

Volume 39 number 1 Spring 1998

Screen

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The many meanings of *Blacula*

Noir and the racial unconscious

***Menace II Society* and the death of Signifyin(g)**

Foreskin fetishism in *Europa, Europa*

Special debate: the death of Diana

Subscription & order information

Screen (ISSN 0036-9543) is published quarterly in March June September December by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. Annual subscription price for institutions of UK and Europe £65 USA and Rest of the World US\$122. Personal subscriptions £36 for UK and Europe and US\$61 USA and Rest of the World and for Students and Unemployed UK and Europe £25, USA and Rest of the World US\$45. **Screen** is distributed by MAIL America, 2323 Randolph Avenue Avenel New Jersey N.J. 07001 USA. Periodical postage paid at Newark, New Jersey, USA and additional entry points. US POSTMASTER: send address changes to **Screen**, c/o MAIL America, 2323 Randolph Avenue Avenel New Jersey N.J. 07001 USA.

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ISSN 0036-9543

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Blacula (William Crain, 1972)

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Theorizing historicity, or the many meanings of *Blacula*

LEEROM MEDOVOI

Theory vs historicism: the 'whys' and 'hows' of historical film criticism

Though film studies is now in the process of joining literary scholarship's recent turn towards historical modes of cultural criticism, its implications for the field remain hotly contested. On the one hand, influential scholars like David Bordwell welcome the change, alleging that overly abstract claims to have theorized the 'grammar' of film language have led critics for too long to neglect the historical situatedness of film meanings.¹ And while Bordwell's admonition is not exactly motivated by a vision of political engagement, it surely echoes Fredric Jameson's challenge to the committed cultural critic: 'always historicize'. Other film scholars, however, question the recent push towards historical criticism, asking whether it actually portends a depoliticizing scholasticization of film studies by way of 'value-neutral' empirical methodologies. Alison Butler, for example, dismayingly asserts that 'the growth of a new historicism in film studies has been accompanied by a decline in the activist [theoretical] tradition that characterized *Screen* . . . in the 1970s . . .', a tradition that, in her view, doggedly critiqued dominant cinema in its role as ideological apparatus, while imagining the utopian possibilities of a counter-cinema.²

As I see it, these rival views are rooted in an implicit disagreement within film scholarship between the partisans of what were once called 'theory' and 'historicism', two competing understandings of engaged social analysis.³ If 'theory', in the form of

¹ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of the Cinema* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

² Alison Butler, 'New film histories and the politics of location', *Screen* vol. 33, no. 4 (1992), pp. 413–26.

³ These rival views were most clearly captured in the debates waged during the late 1960s and early 1970s between Louis Althusser and E. P. Thompson. For the key texts, see Althusser's 'Marxism is not a historicism' in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Redwood Press, 1972), pp. 119–44. Also see Thompson's response in E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Press, 1978).

- 4 Jane Gaines 'White privilege and looking relations: race and gender in feminist film theory', *Cultural Critique*, no. 4 (Fall, 1986), pp. 59–79

- 5 H. Aram Veesser launches his anthology on the 'new historicism' in literary studies by citing an unashamedly vulgar expression of historicism's reconstructionist aims, the opening sentence of Stephen Greenblatt's first book: 'I began with the desire to speak to the dead'. H. Aram Veesser, Introduction, *The New Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. ix–xvi.
- 6 In her critique of the ideology of scientific objectivity which she sometimes calls the 'god-trick' or the 'view from nowhere', Donna Haraway has proposed the term 'situated knowledge' to identify precisely such local forms of knowledge made accessible through one's relation of epistemological difference (historically or positionally) to the position of the uncooperative other, the object of knowledge as 'coyote' or 'trickster'. See Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective', *Feminist Studies* vol. 14 no. 3 (1988), pp. 575–99.

highly productive structuralist and psychoanalytic models of subjectivity, quickly came to predominate in radical Anglo-American film criticism of the 1970s and early 1980s (led by the groundbreaking feminist scholarship of Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, and Teresa de Lauretis), by the late 1980s the mood had begun to change. Jane Gaines, for example, complained in an influential essay of 1986 that the psychoanalytic approach to sexual difference in spectatorship theory had made it 'theoretically impossible to introduce the category of history' into feminist film criticism.⁴ For Gaines, this was particularly problematic for the analysis of race and film because it rendered unbroachable the relevance of African-American history to cinematic looking-relations. One might also cite here the steadily growing impact on film studies of British cultural studies, a critical project whose intellectual reference points include not only structuralism and semiotics, but also the historicist and culturalist methods of E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams. In the last decade, a veritable explosion in historical film scholarship has occurred, but the question of how to reframe the relationship of history and theory remains open.

In this essay, I would like to take a step towards articulating a politically engaged, sophisticated historicist agenda for film studies that, rather than turning 'against theory', actually widens the arena for theory's critical interventions. In the wake of powerful, postmodern feminist, Foucauldian and postcolonial critiques of science, it has become difficult to maintain grand claims for a transcendent vantage point outside of ideology. Yet it seems equally clear to me that the historicism sometimes offered as the corrective to misguided 'scientism' has often entailed a naive confidence of its own that the past can be allowed to speak in its 'own voice'.⁵ I would like to navigate a third route between these equally problematic poles. Though historicism offers the crucial insight that there are no historically transcendent terms by which either the past or the present can be grasped absolutely, I want to insist that only theory can provide us with crucial forms of partial and local systemic knowledge.⁶ Indeed, as I will show, theory is indispensable if we are to construct the complexly layered analyses that can successfully iterate the ideological stakes raised by the historicity of any particular film or film formation. I would like to propose that, at the present moment, film scholars would do well to shift their attention away from the *textuality* or the *subjectivity* of film, and towards the *historicity* of film, a topic of comparable theoretical complexity. By this I am not asking for a normative model of history – a singular structural logic by which a film's historical meaning can be fixed and determined. On the contrary, I am committed in this essay to broadening the scope of theoretical options available to historical film criticism, pointing out many different paths along

which we might choose to theorize a film's historicity, and thereby learn something from it about the past as well as the present.

I have chosen to pursue these questions concretely by way of *Blacula* (William Crain, 1972), a fairly obscure film produced during the blaxploitation cycle of 1970s Hollywood. Loosely adapted from Bram Stoker's Dracula story, *Blacula* is a film that invites several modes of historical analysis. It can be fruitfully historicized in terms of the broad sweep of African-American history, but can also be seen as an intervention within the historical operations of the vampire narrative. It can be situated in relation to blaxploitation as a crucial moment in the development of popular black cinema. And finally, *Blacula* can be read against a history of the racial uprisings in the late 1960s and early 1970s. *Blacula*, a film that most critics would consider to be insignificant and unambitious, is remarkable for the depth and complexity of its many historical meanings, meanings that emerge, however, only by theorizing its historicity by way of Marxist, structuralist, feminist and psychoanalytic models. As I will show, *Blacula* is a film whose ideological import is not easily determined, but whose historical value for the contemporary critic of film and race runs very deep. I have also chosen *Blacula* because it is a film whose political meanings seem to have taken new turns in the wake of the Los Angeles uprising of 1992. Recent history added further layers of significance to this film, and a recognition of how such continuous temporal resignification works would seem vital to antiracist, feminist, Marxist, queer and other engaged modes of cultural criticism.

Historicity and theories of referentiality: screening slavery

Before launching this discussion of *Blacula*'s historicity, a brief synopsis is in order. Though principally set in modern Los Angeles (that is, in 1972), *Blacula* begins with a prefatory scene taking place in 1780. Mamuwalde, an African prince, has journeyed with his wife, Luva, to the castle of the supposedly enlightened European statesman, Count Dracula. They come to win over the Count as an advocate for the abolition of the slave trade, but instead the Africans discover that Count Dracula is actually a racist, and a proponent of slavery, who arrogantly proclaims his desire for Mamuwalde's wife as an example of the kind of delights that human bondage has to offer. Seizing them both, Dracula renames the African prince Blacula, curses him with a vampiric hunger for blood, and entombs him in a coffin where this hunger can never be sated.

The film now jumps to the present, as an interracial gay couple purchases the abandoned castle's contents and ships them to Los Angeles. Unfortunately for them, Blacula's coffin is included, and when the two men open it he kills them. On the loose in

Blacula. Picture courtesy:
BFI Stills.



Los Angeles, Blacula spots a woman, Tina, who perfectly resembles his wife from two centuries past. Tina has a sister named Michelle, whose boyfriend, Dr Gordon Thomas, becomes the film's hero. Thomas, an officer in the police department's division for scientific investigation, unknowingly meets Blacula through his girlfriend, Michelle, while the vampire, using his original African name of Mamuwalde, courts her sister, Tina. Blacula tries to seduce Tina, and thereby reincarnate his African bride. Meanwhile he keeps killing, leaving a trail of new vampires in his wake.

Gordon Thomas gradually wises up to Mamuwalde, and persuades Jack Peters, his incredulous white superior at headquarters, to help him destroy the vampire. With Tina's reluctant assistance, Thomas and the police try to trap Blacula the next time he visits her. Instead, Blacula summons Tina. Leading a police squad, Gordon Thomas, Michelle and Jack Peters follow Tina into an abandoned underground chemical plant where Blacula kills a number of the cops. When Thomas and Peters find Blacula's coffin, they prepare to kill him. But instead of Blacula it is the vampirized Tina who takes the stake. Heartbroken at losing Tina, Blacula climbs up into the bright sunlight and destroys himself.

What historical meanings can we attribute to a text such as *Blacula*? The sorts of 'histories' recently taken up by many film critics – histories of sexuality, colonialism, race relations, and so forth – are more readily recognized as extending beyond the cinema than, say, the histories of movie industries, film technologies and aesthetic innovations.⁷ The history of African slavery thematized by *Blacula* is yet another such history whose cultural concerns extend beyond the cinema proper. The immediate critical problem, then, is how to theorize the relationship that texts may bear to the broader

7 Patrice Petro draws this distinction as one between a formal history that follows the (film) object and a cultural history that follows the (film) subject, with the latter being of greater interest to feminist critics. I would add that this concern with the historical subject of film, and thus with the relation of film to culture at large, is characteristic of most progressive scholars engaged in historical criticism. Patrice Petro, 'Feminism and film history', in Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar and Janice R. Welsh (eds), *Multiple Voices in Feminist Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

histories in which they may be imbricated. It is the Marxist critical tradition that has explored this theoretical problem most extensively, and so it is to this that I now turn.

Nearly all varieties of Marxist criticism feature a strong claim regarding this relationship between text and history, and it is one that, at its minimum, argues for history as the final referent of any text. Of course, this formulation admits to a wide range of possible relationships. The term 'final' here, echoing the famous Althusserian caution that elements of the superstructure are determined only in the 'last instance' by the base, suggests that this referential relationship may be highly attenuated, complex, perhaps even obscure. Similarly, the very term 'history' in Marxist criticism is open to a considerable range of definitions. Though it may be narrowly defined as the class relations basic to an era's mode of production (Lukacs's history as a dialectical totality), there are alternative understandings of history in Marxist cultural theory, ranging from the ideological position of a social class (Lucien Goldman) to the play of a period's social discourse (Valentin Volosinov)⁸ More recently, the post-Marxist work of British Cultural Studies on the one hand, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe on the other, has expanded the possible meaning of 'history' tremendously by making Michel Foucault's notion of a 'discursive formation', a partial regularity of the social field, available as the 'historical referent' within Marxist criticism.

In film studies, the critical turn to historical meaning has resuscitated the Marxist premiss of the 'historical referent'. Jane Gaines's commitment to Marxist criticism, for example, rests largely on her belief that only its historical materialist method can relegate the critique of ideology, which she understands to mean the evaluation by a critic of the social/historical claims of texts regarding the meaning of their historical referents.⁹ Similarly, Linda Williams, in her perceptive essay on *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945), invokes Fredric Jameson's postulation of a political unconscious in fictional narrative as a means of navigating a third path between theoretical and historical modes of feminist film criticism. Williams presents Jameson as a cultural critic who avoids simple-minded claims that a text 'reflects' history, yet remains committed to the notion of historical referentiality.¹⁰ If, as Williams suggests, the theoretical turn taken by feminist film studies in the mid 1970s was at least in part responding to the reductionist historicizations of earlier critics who always saw women's social position neatly reflected in Hollywood's narratives and images, subsequent feminist film theory has implicitly concerned itself with the *repression* of women's history. Films are read for their obfuscation of actual women's lives under the omnipresent sign of 'Woman', the feminine ground through which the masculine figure of Hollywood Oedipal narrative moves and is thereby consolidated. Using the case of *Mildred Pierce* and its covert relationship to World

8 See David Forgacs's essay, 'Marxist literary theories' in Ann Jefferson and David Robey (eds) *Modern Literary Theory: a Comparative Introduction* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Press 1986) for a short and useful survey of these various models. Tony Bennett's *Outside Literature* (New York: Routledge 1990) is an excellent synthetic study whose insights and polemics against Marxist presuppositions of History (capitalized) as singular and totalizing are instructive.

9 Gaines therefore quotes Terry Lovell approvingly: 'while interpretation depends on analysis of the work's signifying practice, assessment of its meanings from the point of view of its validity, or of its ideology, depends on comparison between those structures of meaning and their object of reference through the mediation of another type of discourse.' Gaines 'White privilege' p. 77.

10 Linda Williams 'Feminist film theory: *Mildred Pierce* and the Second World War', in E. Deidre Pribram (ed.), *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television* (New York: Verso 1988) pp. 12-30.

War II, Williams in turn proposes a model of criticism that would investigate how films may simultaneously reflect and repress women's history.

I will return later to the issue of historical repression raised by Williams, but for the moment I would like to consider the matter of reflection. Though Williams does not raise this point, the genealogy of so-called 'reflection theory' also has sources in Marxist cultural criticism. It can be traced back to Georg Lukacs's analysis of genre and literary form in *The Historical Novel*, where he summarizes his argument as one in which every genre should be understood as:

a particular reflection of reality, [and] that genres could only arise as reflections of typical and general facts of life that regularly occur and which could not be adequately reflected in the forms hitherto available.¹¹

11 George Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 289.

Subsequent Marxist critics from Theodor Adorno to Raymond Williams have rejected 'reflection theory' as a model that fails to acknowledge mediating forces between text and history. 'Reflection theory', as its critics have noted, renders the text entirely passive and inert, a mere surface that does nothing to transform or rework the historical formations to which it is held to refer. Despite Linda Williams's attempt to rescue reflection as one component in a more sophisticated historical criticism, her effort to pose the historical meaning of film texts by other means echoes a general loss of faith in the reflection model.¹²

12 Interestingly, Patrice Petro makes a similar plea for a reconsideration of the reflection thesis as a way of returning film studies to the subject of social history.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that most historically minded critics have continued to pursue a variant of Lukacsian criticism by invoking the term 'representation' as an alternative to 'reflection' that seems to escape the latter's inadequacies. If reflection demands a relation of verisimilitude and realism between text and history, one that is deeply fixated on iconic and metaphoric forms of signification based on principles of similarity, representation points more broadly to a referential function of the text, one that might operate according to other semiological principles such as the indexical or symbolic, the metonymic or synecdochic.

The case of African-American film criticism is particularly instructive. While it is clear that black film criticism is deeply concerned with the relationship of Hollywood films to the history of US racial formations, given Hollywood's longstanding use of black stereotypes, the theory of reflection becomes a patently unacceptable mode of historical criticism. Even armed with such auxiliary modifiers as 'distortion', the critic of black film would hardly want to interpret Hollywood's black images as 'reflecting' the historical situation of African-Americans. African-American film criticism, particularly in the work of Donald Bogle or Daniel Leab in the 1970s, certainly examined films in terms of how they re-present history, how they configure and depict some domain of the past. But

- 13 Donald Bogle *Toms Coons*
Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks
an Interpretive History of Blacks
in American Films (New York
 Continuum, 1993) Daniel Leab
From Sambo to Superspade
 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1976)
- 14 Edward Guerrero *Framing*
Blackness: the African-American
Image in Film (Philadelphia:
 Temple University Press 1993)
 pp 9–40

Bogle and Leab analysed stereotypical black images in Hollywood not as reflections, but as active and politicized *representations* of the social history of black–white relations in America, representations that they usually interpreted as the result of complex negotiations between black actors and a white-controlled film industry.¹³ This approach reaches its most sophisticated version in Ed Guerrero's analysis of Hollywood representations of black slavery from the white supremacist *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1930) to the black-centred *Mandingo* (Richard Fleischer, 1975).¹⁴

Blacula is an unusual film in the way that it integrates the Hollywood representation of African–American slavery addressed by Guerrero along with a blaxploitational representation of the urban present. In so doing, *Blacula* represents the rare issue (for a popular film) of black historical change. Like more recent films set in South-Central Los Angeles, *Boyz 'n the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991) and *Menace II Society* (Allen and Albert Hughes, 1993), *Blacula* begins with a past-tense scene that frames its representation of 'black-on-black' violence in the present. In the case of both *Boyz* and *Menace*, however, the past-tense scenes assert a social continuity between past and present. *Boyz* shows us the childhood of its protagonist, Tre, in the 1970s as a moment hardly less threatening or dangerous than his adolescence in the 1980s. *Menace* similarly begins with footage of the Watts Riots and the precarious lives of its protagonists' parents before moving forward into an unchanged present. *Blacula*, however, reaches much farther back, to the eighteenth century, finding a past that allows it to place the urban violence it depicts into a broader historical field. The vampire's aggression in present-day African–America is tied to the destructive legacy of the slave trade. As *Blacula* himself tells it, he went to Europe to bring an end to slavery, and instead he was himself enslaved: subjugated by a white sadist, re-named after his master, torn away from his beloved, and literally forced to make the middle passage in a coffin. This history lies behind *Blacula*'s vampiric destructiveness.

The relationship established by the narrative between the slavery of the past and the violence of the present, however, bears unexpected connotations. Mamuwalde's and Luva's stately visit to Castle Dracula in 1780 stresses their nobility as a heterosexual couple where the husband commands political, intellectual and filial respect. By contrast, the visit of Bobby and Billy, a mixed-race gay couple whom the film depicts as degenerate and ridiculous, comes to figure slavery's damaging effect on black character. Relative to Mamuwalde, whom Luva calls the 'crystallization of our people's pride', Bobby, the black queen, and the first contemporary black man to appear in the film, comes to embody the loss of African pride and a degeneration into modern sexual decadence. *Blacula*'s subsequent victims, an uppity woman taxi-driver and a promiscuously dressed

woman photographer, also seem associated with a sexually coded post-slavery loss of black male honour that must be avenged.

The legacy of the slave trade is figured not only by the vampire's victims, of course, but also by the vampire himself, in the transition from Mamuwalde, a wise, noble and humane African leader, to Blacula, a creature cursed with a violent desire for human blood. The bloodthirstiness of white, slave-trading eighteenth-century Europe is a doubled curse: not only did it oppress eighteenth-century Africa, but this oppression has since been internalized by twentieth-century African–America as either sexual degeneracy or rage. Together, these contrasting experiences of emasculation and fury point to a broader historical meaning, namely that the humiliation inflicted by the slave trade, as figured in Dracula's humiliation of Mamuwalde before his wife, has led to a loss of black men's authority – embodied in homosexuality, miscegenation and black women's insubordination – that in turn leads them to a violent, sadistic rage against that humiliation, one that may be tragically misdirected.

The narrative trajectory of *Blacula* can be understood as a competition between two rival efforts to undo the damage wrought by the enslavement depicted in the opening scene. The first effort is that of Blacula himself, expressed in his struggle to regain his past wife, Luva, in the present through Tina, and thus to recuperate the nobility of African culture. A second effort to undo the damage of the slave trade is embodied by the character of Dr Gordon Thomas. Though a man of the diasporic present rather than the African past, Thomas is nonetheless a masculine hero, a scientific investigator who is straight, stands up to the white man when he should, and is respected by his lover, Michelle. Thomas's ultimately successful attempt to vanquish Blacula represents yet another attempt to extinguish the pain – expressed in the vampire's rage – born of the slave trade.

Historicity and narrative forms: the value of a vampire

Slavery and its aftermath would seem to be the 'history' within which we would situate the meaning of this text. Yet it also seems important to question why, of all possible fictional forms, such a history might find an articulation through the codes and conventions of the vampire story. As Hayden White's *Metahistory* showed some two decades ago, historical meaning inevitably makes recourse to generic codes.¹⁵ Moving through the great works of nineteenth-century European historians, White establishes that to represent the past is to emplot it, and that emplotment entails the engaging of narrative genres, even if broadly conceived as romance, tragedy or satire. White's argument at first seems to offer a means of intimately relating history and textuality by stressing the irreducible role of

¹⁵ Hayden White *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1973)

representational conventions in making history accessible to us. Yet for critics attempting to map out the referential dimensions of films and other cultural artefacts, White's study pushes the importance of textuality even further, to the point where it undermines the legitimacy of their enterprise. If history has no independent existence beyond the texts in which it is represented, but is, on the contrary, their structural effect, then in the terminology of semiotics, history would seem not to be the referent, but merely a special sort of signified. Viewed from this perspective, texts do not so much represent the past as construct it, mobilizing the rhetoric of history in order to produce what one might call a history-effect. If this is so, then we can never claim epistemological access to the past-as-it-was, but only the past-as-it-is in those texts that we read. Beyond such history-effects, structuralism (and poststructuralism as well) suggest that we have no access to the past. The 'history' that the critic intends to relate to the text is simply one more of its semiological functions, namely its capacity to generate truth-claims regarding the past. Returning to *Blacula*, a structuralist critique of history would ask us to consider the opening scene in Transylvania as having nothing to do with 1780 (its chronological referent), but to treat it as a scene whose historicity consists in constructing the meaning of slavery in a past-tense relation of difference from the subsequent present-tense scenes set in Los Angeles. Past and present operate no differently than town and country, male and female, or any other binary that might structure the meaning of the text.

One possible Marxist rebuttal to this structuralist move might be to counter that the account of history as textual-effect only seems to hold *after* a structuralist abstraction from history has already occurred. The Saussurian theory of language upon which structuralism is based proceeds by removing language out of the pragmatic sphere of social discourse, then formalizing it as a grammatical structure that can be studied independently of its actual uses over time. Langue must be derived from parole, but parole's status is then diminished as mere example or instance of the langue which the structuralist critic has at her/his disposal. If history is understood as the diachronic axis of human practice, the dimension of social change, process and transformation over time, then the basic methodology of structuralism, namely its move to investigate meaning only at the level of synchronic structures, seems predicated on the denial of historicity.¹⁶

This is hardly the place to do justice to what has been a longstanding and much rehearsed dialogue between Marxist and structuralist theory. Taking my cue from the Marxist rebuttal, however, it is enough for my purposes to observe that the generic codes through which texts produce historical meaning might possess histories of their own. Historical reference, as structuralist analysis demonstrates, depends upon generic codes, forms, and structures. But

16 Jameson's critique of synchronic or 'hypostasizing' thought seems to fall roughly in with this line of argument. See both *Marxism and Form* (Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 269–70) and *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 90–93. In general such rebuttals seem to capitulate on the point that history is not an extra-discursive realm. If 'parole' becomes the site to which Marxism retreats in order to defend the status of history as both source and referent of literary cinematic and otherwise cultural works, then that site is unquestionably linguistic. By treating discourse in materialist terms, as meaningful practice, Marxist theory might opt to reformulate history along the lines of Volosinov's theory of language as a dynamic field of struggle over social definitions, connotations and significations. Tony Bennett, who considers the structuralist critique of Marxism's History (capitalized) to be unassailable, has proposed yet another alternative in which history is treated as a specific disciplinary regime of discourse, like the law, that is nevertheless governed by its own internal protocols for the determination of valid knowledge.

if generic forms are not, as archetypalists like Northrop Frye once argued, timeless cultural constructs, but themselves have pasts we can elect to study, then instead of a critique of history, structuralist analyses might instead lead to a multiplication of history. Indeed, one way to understand the innovation of poststructuralism would be as a certain resolution to the Marxist/structuralist standoff, whereby texts are recognized as unstable systems of historical signification that emerge at the points of intersection and contradiction between the historical formations they encode and the historical dimension of the generic codes they use to re-present those formations.

The case of *Blacula* helps to clarify what is at stake in all this. The film represents slavery and its aftermath via the conventions of the vampire story, itself a subgenre of the gothic. Yet the gothic and the vampire narratives have histories that themselves need to be accounted for. Quickly summing up a complex scholarship, the eighteenth-century gothic, which originates alongside the other major genres of the bourgeois novel, has been distinguished by its deeply ambivalent approach to a pre-bourgeois past associated with forces of irrationality, superstition, aristocratic despotism, sexual terror and darkness. Maggie Kilgour's genealogy of the uses of 'gothic' suggests,

While the term [gothic] could . . . be used to demonise the past as a dark age of feudal tyranny, it could also be used equally to idealise it as a golden age of innocent liberty. Its meaning was the territory for a political battle between the ancients and the moderns over the nature of the past and its relation to the present. It was at the centre of a British version of its own history . . .¹⁷

17 Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 14

Literary critics from Leslie Fiedler on have noted how this gothic past to an 'enlightened' present is typically embodied in a diabolical, yet virile and fascinating hero-villain, associated with the aristocracy or the Church, who pursues and captures the pure maiden fleeing from him across a gloomy, often feudal landscape, from which she must then be rescued by the protagonist.

In the nineteenth century, as Judith Halberstam indicates, gothic horror shifts away from the corruption of the nobility or clergy, and toward the monstrous bodies presented in such novels as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and, of course, *Dracula*. Such gothic monstrosities, Halberstam suggests, are closely related to the rise of racialized understandings of national identity.¹⁸ Of all these monsters, however, the vampire most explicitly refashions the gothic horror of the eighteenth century, by allowing the feudal past to literally take on a second life and supernaturally invade the present. Beginning with the Romantics, the vampire began to embody an aristocratic, sexually predatory, and often orientalized Other. It emerges out of the premodern, prewestern gothic past to threaten the bourgeois (sexually disciplined) self in its

18 Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) p. 16

19 Ken Gelder's *Reading the Vampire* lists ethnic, sexual, oriental, aristocratic, even capital as the various axes of alterity embodied by the vampire, and specifically in Stoker's *Dracula* Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (New York: Routledge, 1994), ch. 1

20 See, for instance, Eric Rentschler's discussion of *Nosferatu* as an intertext for the antisemitic Nazi propaganda film *Jüd Süss/Jew Süss* (Vest Harlan, 1940). Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 156–7

21 Rhona Berenstein, *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 12. For an exhaustive catalogue of the vampire in cinema, see Alain Silver and James Ursini, *The Vampire Film from Nosferatu to Bram Stoker's Dracula* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994)

22 Sue-Ellen Case reads this connotation in terms of heterosexuality's association with life/reproduction, and hence queer sexuality with its 'other', unlife/non-reproductive sexuality. This chain of associations is clearly one possible articulation of the vampire, but by no means exhausts the figure's signification. See Sue-Ellen Case, 'Tracking the vampire', *Differences*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1991), pp. 1–20

23 Manthia Diawara, 'Black American culture: the new realism', in Diawara (ed.), *Black American Cinema: Aesthetics and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 3–25, 9–10

24 Toni Cade Bambara, 'Reading the signs, empowering the eye: daughters of the dust and the black independent cinema movement', in Diawara (ed.), *Black American Cinema*, pp. 118–44

own modern, historical locale, typically obsessed by and preying upon a young, modern woman. Modern men in the vampire narrative often find they must unite, utilizing all their present-day scientific resources in order to prevent the usurpation of their (patriarchal and/or hetero-) sexual privilege. The gothic and the vampire narratives, then, are historical genres from the start, both in the sense that they construct a relation between past and present, and also in the sense that this relation is linked at first to early bourgeois attitudes towards the former rule of the aristocracy, and then to the association of the non-West with an erotics of despotism that is analogized to the bourgeois West's own feudal past.

Though the gothic may issue from these particular historical reference points (constructing aristocracy and the non-West against bourgeois enlightenment), one should avoid fetishizing them as determinant of the genre's historical meanings. Once established, genres continually refashion the historical nexus from which they emerge, and become highly autonomous regulating regimes for cultural production and reception that can then recode entirely new social settings. This is especially well illustrated by the vampire, whose translation into cinema seems related to its highly flexible figuration of alterity.¹⁹ Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1921), some critics have suggested, can be read as an allegory of the threat posed by the sexualized Jew to the German national body.²⁰ The classic Hollywood horror genre, as Rhona Berenstein notes, was born through the Depression-era box-office success of Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), a film that set in motion a fluctuating field of sexual meanings by which Hollywood femininity and monstrosity could come to connote one another.²¹ Feminist and queer critics have also explored how the female vampire has enabled strikingly explicit cinematic representations of lesbo-erotic desire in an array of films that stretch from *Dracula's Daughter* (Lambert Hillyer, 1936) through *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983) to *Nadja* (1996).²²

In the early 1970s, African-American cinema also began deploying the vampire figure via a complex transaction with its white European associations. The most aesthetically ambitious of this cluster of films was Bill Gunn's experimental 1973 work, *Ganja and Hess*, a film whose 'cyclical' temporality has been applauded by Manthia Diawara for putting 'in the same space African spirituality, European vampire stories, the Black church, addiction to drugs, and liberated feminist desires'.²³ According to Toni Cade Bambara, Gunn shot *Ganja and Hess* with the explicit aim of 'outdoing' *Blacula*,²⁴ and, in many respects, the two films explore many of the same thematics; like *Ganja and Hess*, *Blacula* takes the historical field of meanings associated with the gothic iconography of light and darkness – present and past – and brings it to bear upon African-American history. In so doing, the codes of the vampire gothic come to regender and resexualize the legacy of slavery. The vampire *Blacula*,

a master of the 'black arts', becomes a dangerous masculine Other from the gothic past who threatens the modern African-American male self (this opposition is aurally thematized by the vacillation of the soundtrack between baroque organ music and early 1970s funk). Instead of a Transylvanian count from the borderlands between Occident and Orient, Blacula is a prince who embodies the imagined virility of ancient Africa for an African-American present. His elegant African name – Mamuwalde – his aristocratic speech, his emotional modulation, all serve to make the tall, handsome, deep-voiced Blacula an embodiment of male charisma associated with the pre-diasporic past.

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the Count becomes the dangerous seducer of Nina and Lucy, and the Victorian men in the novel must work as a team – the 'party of light' under Dr Van Helsing's scientific guidance – to defeat their dark, sexual rival from the European past. In *Blacula*, Gordon Thomas is the doctor of science who coordinates the hunt. Like Mamuwalde, Thomas is a proud black man who does not compromise with white authority, even that of his own boss, Jack Peters. Gradually, however, Peters becomes Gordon Thomas's main collaborator in the effort to capture Blacula. Moreover, there is not a single other black cop in the film. As the male community that works against Blacula becomes larger and larger, it also becomes whiter and whiter, although always anchored by the leadership of Gordon Thomas. The gothic historical iconography of a dark past and a bright present becomes increasingly racialized as black and white American men of the present work together against a dark threat issuing from the black American past, one that will finally be destroyed by exposure to the brilliant rays of the sun. Nevertheless, this 'dark' past is still one for which whites are culpable, since the viewer knows that it is Dracula who inflicted the vampire's rage upon the African-American community of the present. The alignment of racial blackness and gothic darkness is never fully stable, since the source of gothic terror still originates in white eighteenth-century Europe, whose false claims to Enlightenment – embodied in the supposedly 'enlightened' Count Dracula to whom Mamuwalde and Luva first appeal – obscures its vampiric exploitation of Africa.

Eve Sedgwick's discussion of the gothic as a potent site of homosexual panic, a narrative form that imagines the terror of one man's erotic power over another, adds a further layer to a discussion of how the vampire narrative might work to represent the category of emasculation in African-American history.²⁵ The vampire's sexual menace, for example, could be read in relation to an implied homosocial desire felt by Thomas for Mamuwalde's manly African charisma. In this view, the sexual humiliation that Blacula himself experienced at the hands of the seemingly noble Count Dracula threatens to repeat itself for Thomas if he cannot kill the monster.

²⁵ Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men*
English Literature and Male
Homosocial Desire (New York:
Columbia University Press 1985)

- 26 Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction: a Bakhtinian Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 28–31.
- 27 Tania Modleski, 'Some functions of feminist criticism, or, the scandal of the mute body' in *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
- 28 The register of historical meaning would conceivably be congruent with the work of several theoretical historical critics, and therefore especially open to lively theoretical debate. I am thinking of Janet Staiger's call for a historical materialist approach to film reception studies and also of Jackie Stacey's push for genuine studies of women's social spectatorship. It is also the place where black theorists like Manthia Diawara and bell hooks have intervened most effectively by making similar arguments for social theories of spectatorship that can accommodate the question of black resistance to Hollywood films. Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Jackie Stacey, *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994); bell hooks, 'The oppositional gaze' in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), pp. 115–31; Manthia Diawara, 'Black spectatorship: problems of identification and resistance', *Screen*, vol. 29 no. 4 (1988), pp. 66–76.
- 29 As Modleski points out, this process is fraught with ideological dangers of its own: what ideological designs might the ethnographic or historical critic her/himself have on audiences or producers in question? Yet without an analysis of the broader historical field in which a text appears, its illocutionary dimension cannot even be entertained.

Mamuwalde's claim on blackness, on the ancient African roots of black American culture, is simultaneously what Thomas desires in Mamuwalde, yet also what gives Mamuwalde the power (explicitly over Tina, and implicitly over Thomas himself) that Thomas so fears. The vampire's conflation of antiquity, blackness and charisma therefore works to constitute an anxiety about contemporary black male emasculation through a homosocial circuit of racial desire for an originary black masculinity.

Received meanings, or blaxploiting the text

What are the ideological implications and consequences of such a routing of African–American history through the vampire narrative? As Jacqueline Howard has observed, literary critics have been continually obsessed with the question of whether the gothic impels a conservative or a subversive relation to social order.²⁶ *Blacula* raises the same pressing question, and in so doing suggests yet another level of historical meaning, one that is perhaps the most overtly political thus far given that the problem it addresses is the text's practical–ideological effects on viewers. Speaking on a parallel issue for feminist criticism, Tania Modleski argues that an indispensable dimension of political insight is lost for criticism that asks only what a text represents, and stops short of exploring,

the illocutionary force of a text . . . [or] how the performative and referential aspects of texts are interrelated. For feminism, it is not simply a question of affirming or denying the accuracy of patriarchal representations, but of understanding what texts . . . *do*, how they *produce* the very resemblances they are then seen to reflect.²⁷

The question of a text's performativity – what it *means* in the sense of what it *does* – demands attention not only to its representational codes and conventions, but also to the actual sites of its production and consumption.²⁸ It might be tempting to ascribe a determinate political 'meaning' to *Blacula*'s ideological designs on its viewer. Such a move, however, would force us to fix or close *Blacula*'s significance prematurely, without any consideration of the specific social conditions within which the film has circulated.²⁹

Blacula, as already noted, is a blaxploitation film, one of a line of low-budget black-oriented films that Hollywood produced during the early 1970s in an effort to stave off financial collapse while simultaneously responding to critical and popular demand for a broader range of black entertainment. The film's performative meaning, then, is played out in this general discursive field. Blaxploitation films, as Ed Guerrero indicates, were marketed to a

largely inner-city, black youth audience, and produced in response to their dissatisfaction with the Sidney Poitier 'ebony saint' image, whereby consistently desexualized roles were usually played out within integrationist film narratives. The seeds of blaxploitation are found in the emergence of more assertive, macho (black athlete) film heroes like Jim Brown, and reach their zenith in the male heroics of *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971) and *Superfly* (Gordon Parks, 1972).³⁰ It seems significant that these films, which appealed greatly to young African-Americans in the early 1970s, often adopt the generic logic of the action-adventure, whose protagonist is precisely such a powerful masculine narrative agent. Blaxploitation can be seen as Hollywood's attempt to objectify in popular film an image of the new, militant black manhood called for by the Black Power Movement but without articulating that masculinity to any clear political programme.

Given that it performed in this context, *Blacula* takes on different historical meanings. One might ask, for example, what *Blacula*'s deployment of the genre of the vampire film might offer an inner-city black youth audience? Perhaps most strikingly, it offers them not one black male hero, as the action-adventure usually does, but two: the protagonist, Gordon Thomas, and the vampire, Blacula. Thomas is a macho black hero of the contemporary moment, in this respect akin to Sweet Sweetback, Shaft, and Superfly. Yet both Sweetback (*Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* [Melvin van Peebles, 1971]), and Priest of *Superfly* are outsider heroes, hunted by the corrupt but powerful agents of white male State authority. Shaft is a private eye, but still not quite a cop. In terms of his relation to the law, the vampire, Blacula actually comes closer to the blaxploitation hero of the action-adventure genre than does Gordon Thomas. The film is named after him, and it is his name that quite literally embodies a sense of black power. The figure of Mamuwalde recalls, for instance, the eulogizing of Malcolm X throughout the late 1960s as the 'shining black prince' of African-America. Moreover, Mamuwalde's African name and status as African noble links him to the Afrocentric cultural politics adopted by some branches of the Black Power movement.³¹ If as Mamuwalde the African prince he embodies an untainted, black cultural heritage, as Blacula the vampire he is a bloodthirsty creature who preys upon the black community of Los Angeles. And if Blacula's presentation of himself as Mamuwalde is seen as mere disguise, then the film might seem to accuse African-identified forms of black power with concealing a desire for violence that African-Americans themselves need to repudiate and contain, attractive as they might find it to be. In the cultural and political contexts of blaxploitation and the early 1970s, then, the range of *Blacula*'s interpretive possibilities indicates considerable ideological volatility. The film is open to Afrocentric viewers who would enjoy the pleasure of identifying with an African hero, while also providing

31 Given the moment of *Blacula*'s release in other words, a crucial but loose referent for the vampire would have been the Black Power movement itself. This is only made explicit in the film at one point, when Gordon Thomas's white supervisor irritates him by suggesting the Panthers may be responsible for the mysterious killings - a possibility Thomas quickly and scornfully rejects. This momentary connection between *Blacula* and Black Power is never repeated, but it cites a social context that is crucial for a historical understanding of the film.

ample room for black viewers who would distrust or reject Afrocentrism.

Blaxploitational narratives, as the popularity of the Pam Grier and Tamara Dobson movies indicates, were not simply or exclusively centred on male heroisms, but could sometimes activate feminine narratives concerning racial loyalties and black pride.³² When placed at the centre of the narrative, Tina transforms *Blacula* into the story of a woman who must decide between her fidelity to a compromised, contemporary black community and her longing for an idealized African civilization of the past, embodied by Mamuwalde. Following Rhona Berenstein's reading of the classic horror film, Tina and Blacula could be taken to double one another as characters who chafe against contemporary African-America's alleged cultural and political compromises with a white power structure. If so, Tina and Mamuwalde's love affair stands in for a grander romance with Africanist blackness. At the same time, this vision is represented in the film as monstrous and terrifying. When Tina actually 'joins' Mamuwalde at the film's end, she becomes a screaming, ghostly creature who Gordon Thomas has no hesitation in killing. These distinctly feminine blaxploitational thematics in *Blacula* hint at a libidinal opposition or tension, for black women viewers of the 1970s, between concrete but everyday loyalty to the African-American community and a passion for a nostalgic Afrocentrism that offers feelings and memories of 'pride' and 'nobility'.

Hidden histories: criticism as returning the repressed

These analyses leave the probable 'conservatism' or 'radicalism' of *Blacula* far from obvious. While the cultural field of blaxploitation shapes and limits *Blacula*'s potential meanings, it can hardly be said to determine them. Nevertheless, to the extent that, as critics, we would care to gauge the ideological effectivity of *Blacula*, it is vital that we assess any and all social conditions that might regulate a historical viewer's interpretive expectations and possibilities. Even if we claim only to be concerned with the film's 'representation' of history, a text-imminent approach will fail to historicize the film adequately. For instance, we cannot even discuss *Blacula*'s implicit representation of the Black Power and Afrocentric movements of the 1960s and 1970s unless we make a case for their latent narrative presence by appealing to the blaxploitational context of film production and consumption. This critical tactic, however, raises the difficult theoretical question of how best to theorize the textual presence of a history that remains manifestly 'unrepresented'.

Earlier I used a citation from Lukacs to introduce 'reflection' theory. In the passage itself, however, Lukacs states unequivocally

³² The most important examples are Pam Grier's heroines in *Coffy* (Jack Hill 1973) and *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill 1974) or Tamara Dobson's in *Cleopatra Jones* (Jack Starrett 1973). While Dobson plays an invincible heroine structurally similar to those of the male blaxploitation heroes, Grier's character is both physically vulnerable and continually subject to abuse by her enemies (both white and black). Her embodiment of black pride, I would argue, is one of the most complex in all of blaxploitation. In *Coffy* Grier plays a woman who is dating a black politician, even as she carries out a vendetta against local drug traders. By the film's end she has realized that her boyfriend while posing as a leader of the community, is actually the lackey of the amoral drug profiteers. *Coffy*'s ambivalence towards this male 'leader' offers strategies for reading Tina's vacillating loyalties in *Blacula*.

that certain 'facts of life' will simply *not* be representable by particular cultural forms. Of course, this moment of history's 'invisibility' in the text functions for Lukacs as a mere prelude to history's triumphant reemergence in some new cultural form. In Lukacs's dialectical account, the inadequate genre serves as thesis to history's antithesis, giving rise to a new genre capable of expressing the social totality precisely where its generic predecessor had failed. Once one calls into question this Hegelian vision of a progressive movement of cultural forms toward historical representability, however, moments of 'invisibility' can no longer be dismissed as merely transitional situations, but must be theorized in their own terms. The historical critic, to be blunt, must be prepared to explain how a text might possibly refer to history without ever representing it.

Linda Williams, as I noted earlier, has called for a mode of criticism that seeks to elucidate both the representational and the repressive relations of film texts to history, relations that she believes are complementary. If representation-based studies locate the signification of history on the textual surface, repression-based ones, in the tradition of Macherey and Althusser's 'symptomatic reading' or Jameson's analysis of a text's 'political unconscious', assume the presence of textual depth, a register of meaning that remains unspoken, unwritten, or unrepresented, yet structures by its very absence all that *has* been spoken, written, or represented.³³ Since the 1980s, African-American film critics too have increasingly begun to present their critical objectives using the terminology of repression. Ed Guerrero, for example, deploys the repressive model in analysing Hollywood's fragmented, metaphorical, and allegorical thematics of race during the late 1970s and early 1980s.³⁴ James Snead, similarly, reads symptomatically for what he calls the 'omitted plots' of *King Kong* (Ernest Schoedsack and Merian Cooper, 1933), as he places the film in a historical relation to black slavery. And if the 'image and stereotype' school of black film criticism did not consider the possibility of history's repressed presence in the text, nevertheless, as Snead puts it:

One may formulate the history of black film stereotypes as the history of the denial of history in favor of an artificially constructed mythology about unchanging black character or nature.³⁵

In these various formulations, black film critics point to a mode of historical criticism concerned with the inscription of film texts by a racial history precisely through that history's apparent absence. *Blacula* presents a particularly interesting case when one considers what elements of the historical moment of its reception might seem to be *repressed* by the way it deploys the generic codes of the vampire narrative. I have already mentioned the significance of Black Power in the film's viewing situation, yet there is more at work,

³³ Jameson cautions that "from the point of view of a political hermeneutic measured against the requirements of a political unconscious", we must conclude that the conception of wish-fulfilment remains locked in a problematic of the individual subject and the individual psychobiography which is only indirectly useful to us. Jameson *The Political Unconscious*, p. 66. Despite these ambivalences Jameson nonetheless launches his theorization of history and literature via Freud's concept of the unconscious. In general Freud's distinction between latent and manifest meaning, as well as his emphasis on the importance of censorship in the operation of meaning in the dreamwork have lent themselves strongly to repressive theories of historical meaning.

³⁴ Guerrero, *Framing Blackness* pp. 41–68.

³⁵ James Snead *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1–29.

historically speaking, than that. Though the slave trade is represented as the direct historical *cause* of Blacula's fate, given the absence of political agents in the film, the vampire serves as the sole figure through whom the entire history of black challenges to white injustice is condensed. No broader reference to racial conflict, beyond Blacula himself, can be found in the film. Nevertheless, the narrative of the film seems structured by an absent historical referent. *Blacula's* present-day sequences, as already noted, are set in Los Angeles, in Watts to be exact, and we are dealing here with the story of a violent force run amok throughout the African-American community, one which Gordon Thomas and the LAPD work together to contain. The Watts Riots of 1965, of course, were followed by many other uprisings in American cities through the late 1960s, but Watts remains the code word for that entire period of urban unrest in recent historical memory.

Only one brief sequence in the film associates the vampire with the riots. Late on in the film, the police decide to try to apprehend Blacula by sitting in wait for him in Tina's bedroom. Their anticipation of the vampire's arrival is eerily intercut with a tense scene on the streets below the apartment. Local residents mill about parked police cars with flashing sirens, while police officers sternly call out, using bullhorns, that nothing is going on and that everyone should go home and mind their own business. During this sequence a shot is inserted of Blacula himself, with full fangs and vampiric regalia, standing on the rooftop of a nearby building and smiling down on the scene below. The strong sense of explosive racial tension between the LAPD and the residents of Watts created by this sequence – and associated with the vampire – is soon undercut as the camera pans to catch several young whites leaving the area. Diffusing the strict black/white lines of confrontation, these figures shift the possible meaning of the scene away from where it began, as the threat of a race riot.

What might it mean for *Blacula's* tale of terror to echo, yet never speak, the social moment most deeply associated with black rage, the Watts Riots? As I noted, Blacula's first victims tend to be black: Bobby, the cab driver, the photographer. When Gordon Thomas demands of Tina that she help him destroy her vampiric suitor, he tells her, 'that man, if you can call him that, has killed innocent people', and Tina's sister screams at her, 'anyone could be next, me or Gordon!', their arguments recapitulate media criticism of the Watts Riots as an outburst of uncontrolled rage that ultimately wreaked only destruction on the black community. Although the rage of the rioters, like Blacula's, was sometimes admitted to be a response to a history of white oppression, their violence, again like Blacula's, was held merely to victimize further the victims of that history. William Grier's and Price Cobbs's 1968 book, *Black Rage*, for example, which aimed to explain the psycho-historical cause of

the urban riots, claims in a chapter titled 'The shadow of the past' that,

much of the pathology we see in black people had its genesis in slavery. The culture that was born in that experience of bondage has been passed from generation to generation.³⁶

36 William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Bantam Books 1968), p. 25. Cobbs and Grier, it must be said, are African-American psychiatrists whose politics were closely tied to Black Power. They claim in *Black Rage* that 'at bottom, America remains a slave country which happens to have removed the laws from the books. The question we must ask is: What held the slave rebellion in check for so long?' *Ibid.* p. 59.

The film embodies such pathologizing accusations in *Blacula* himself. In the figurative terms of the film, Dracula's vampirism, inflicted upon *Blacula*, was in turn inflicted by *Blacula* upon the citizens of Watts.

If the film at first seems to come down on the side of Gordon Thomas's righteousness, and hence implies a criticism of urban rioters, the valence of *Blacula* gradually shifts more and more in favour of the vampire. As already noted, Thomas increasingly seems to be leading a white police force after *Blacula*. By the second half of the film *Blacula* is no longer vampirizing African-Americans, but killing white LAPD cops right and left in legitimate self-defence as they assault him and his beloved Tina.

The case of *Blacula* and the Watts Riots attests how certain historical meanings may only emerge if the history to which they refer has itself been repressed.³⁷ Were Thomas explicitly working with the LAPD to bust rioters, for instance, then for a blaxploitation audience he would unavoidably become a Judas, a collaborator with the Man. As a cop grappling with a vampire's random acts of violence, however, he is encoded as a good hero fighting to vanquish a monster. *Blacula*, in turn, precisely because he is a monster, can be shown throttling and killing white police officers who have come to Watts, something that would simply be impermissible for any other sort of black character in a Hollywood film. And yet *Blacula* is also charismatic, associated in multiple ways with a virile and vibrant noble African past that is now wreaking revenge on its white oppressor. The repression of the Watts Riots therefore enables both Thomas and *Blacula* to become powerful figures for identification among the blaxploitation audience.

37 Linda Williams's adoption of the repressive approach to historical reference is motivated by this same line of reasoning. The ability of *Mildred Pierce* to explore women's wartime independence, Williams convincingly demonstrates, was enabled precisely by its erasure of the war in the narrative. The film, she argues, is 'better able to reflect the problems encountered by women under patriarchal rule precisely because it does not reflect [but represses] the specific [wartime] historical conditions that made this criticism possible in the first place'. Under certain circumstances then, a text's historical referent must be repressed before certain of that referent's meanings can emerge. These circumstances, as I have suggested, involve social conditions under which these meanings are culturally unacceptable and must be censored.

The registers of 'history': representation, reference, and *Blacula's* many meanings

By now I hope I have shown that *Blacula's* historical meaning resonates at many registers. I first discussed *Blacula* as a representation of the historical pain and damage inflicted by slavery, which it strategically mediated through the terms of emasculation and black rage. This history was not transparently rendered, however, but encoded through the gothic vampire narrative, which allows the film to construct a virile, African past against a rational, but sexually threatened African-American present. Film history itself also proved

highly relevant to *Blacula*'s meaning once I considered the way that the film splits the blaxploitation cycle's male hero between Thomas and Blacula, while also offering a female heroine internally divided between an African-American present and an African past. Finally, I considered the Watts Riots as a structuring historical absence in the film, a referent whose repression enables the film to achieve a certain political ambivalence towards the event.

At each of these levels it is impossible to separate historical meaning from theories of historicity, though certainly any one particular theoretical model could yield a variety of very different historical meanings. One might, for example, choose to argue for something other than the Watts Riots as the film's absent referent. Given that so many blaxploitation films deal with drug plots against the black community, one could perhaps read *Blacula* as an exploration of the vampiric devastation wreaked by the drugs trade on the neighbourhood of South Central. This too is a form of historical damage that originates in white culture, but takes on a black face in the community. As such alternative readings indicate, even *within* any particular theoretically informed mode of historical analysis, the meaning of a film cannot be fixed, but remains available to multiple understandings. No historical method determines or guarantees the delivery of a particular historical meaning, though it should conversely be possible for critics to specify the method relevant to activating any particular field of historical meaning.

The relationship *between* these different critical modes, however, remains to be addressed. A film text constitutes a complex system of interlocking and overlapping historical meanings, including its deployment of historically specific generic codes and conventions, its representation of particular histories as its narrative subject, its repression or erasure of other histories, and finally its performative meaning given a particular historical context of production, marketing and consumption. I have not meant to privilege any one theoretical approach to a text's historicity, but instead to point out the ways in which these various registers are mutually constitutive. The film's representation of slavery, its tale of the vampire, its young African-American audience, its blaxploitation heroism and its silence on the riots are all related aspects of its historical effectivity, and hence its political significance. One would be hard pressed to explain any one of these meanings without some reference to the others.

However, I would like to conclude with something beyond a gesture toward the 'free play' of historical registers, since I believe that the weakness of new historicism as a school of criticism rests in deferring difficult discussions of the relationships *between* different regimes and orders of discourse. It seems important to me that at least a provisional set of distinctions be maintained between any text's historical referentiality, representationality and meaning. These distinctions might be quite difficult to discern in the case of a newly

released film set in the present, but if one considers a historical epic or a science-fiction film, the difference between the history that a film represents (a past or future respectively) and the history to which it refers (the present) becomes much more obvious. Moreover, when a film is viewed fifty years after it was first produced it also becomes easier to distinguish between the history to which it refers – the relevant then and now of its moment of production – and its historical meaning – what it may signify to a viewer half a century later. If representation invokes a text's discursivity, while reference suggests its sociality, then meaning-production might be said to occur at the contingent interfaces of a text's discursivity and sociality

Each of these historical registers – representation, reference and meaning – adds another layering of methodological obligations on the part of a politically committed critic. The analysis of representation demands theoretical sophistication for, as we saw, historical representation necessarily involves a process of encoding that calls forth semiotic, narratological and subject-positioning analyses of cinema. Historical referentiality, however, opens additional questions that cannot be addressed without a further commitment to methodologies of contextualization: the conditions of production, of reception and, most broadly, of informing social discourse. Whenever a critic elaborates a film's historical representation and referentiality, she/he is by default already generating new historical meanings, but here too methods of self-awareness and self-placement are vital if the critic hopes to register the historical determinants that guide her/his critical inquiry

Blacula explicitly offers us a representation of enslavement in the eighteenth century, as well as of life in 1970s Watts. Beyond what it represents, it also refers to the Watts Riots, the Black Power movement, as well as the historical meanings that slavery might hold for that moment (such as its meaning for Cobbs and Griens as the key to mid-twentieth-century black rage). *Blacula*'s historical meaning, however, involves not simply what is represented or referred to by the film, but what then happens when the film is negotiated by an actual viewer, who perhaps inhabits a completely different historical moment. I have said relatively little about how the 1990s figure into *Blacula*'s historical meaning, but implicit all along in this essay has been the notion that the many meanings of *Blacula* I have been elaborating are present-day meanings at least partially determined by my own placement in history

It is no coincidence that, even as I write, blaxploitation is experiencing a nostalgic revival.³⁸ The reasons for this interest in blaxploitation are no doubt complicated, but they surely have something to do with a fascination for a moment, just after the late 1960s, when radically antiracist political change, extensive African-American solidarity, and socioeconomic improvements in urban working-class neighbourhoods all seemed so much more

³⁸ Just two summers ago, for example, Film Forum in New York City ran a month-long blaxploitation retrospective that drew enormous and diverse crowds. Another blaxploitation festival played at San Francisco's Roxie Theatre last year, and I am sure there are other such revivals of which I am not yet aware.

probable than they do now. Blaxploitation has become a curious blip in the racial history of Hollywood cinema, a film cycle whose aesthetic often seems camp today, but perhaps in part because it expresses such utopian impulses.

Although I do not believe I fully understood the connection at the time, it first occurred to me to write about *Blacula* shortly after the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Only gradually have I begun to consider how this film has become a very different visual experience in the 1990s. The bitter frustration of African-American Los Angeles with the deterioration of the community's political and economic strength since the late 1960s, not to mention the specific historical intervention of the Rodney King videotape, adds a strong charge to this story of an African vampire anti-hero locked in struggle with the LAPD, even as it makes the heroism of the police more difficult to fathom as a source of black pleasure in popular film. At the same time, the contemporary eye is struck by the now impossibly apolitical way in which this battle is staged (at a superficial level, *Blacula* presents itself as a mere tale of cops vs monster). In the mid 1990s, *Blacula* has somehow become a provocative, astonishing, and *unusual* film text, playing the distant and the recent past off of the present in ways that raise questions about where we now stand, and how the politics of racial representation have been so rapidly reshaped in the last few decades. If relating past and present allows a critic to create the future as a space of open possibility, to find an avenue for thinking about social and political change, then *Blacula* offers a remarkably rich text from which to stage such a project.

Film noir and the racial unconscious

JULIAN MURPHET

The critical and industrial longevity of film noir as a cinematic category arguably rests on two buried layers of meaning. Firstly, the persistence of the French classification implies the transference of aesthetic prestige between a European critical vocabulary and a particularly cheap and low-brow US cultural product.¹ In this sense, film noir would be one of the first instances of a postmodernism in which the distinctions of high and low were dissolved in an increasingly global network of cultural exchange and an aggressive populism after World War II. Secondly, any reference (no matter how veiled) to 'blackness' in US culture instantly evokes the entire history of race relations in US politics and everyday life. This overdetermination of the phrase 'film noir' invests the initial film cycle of that name with a political unconscious, since neither transatlantic aesthetics nor black/white race relations play a direct role in the figuration of postwar life offered by these films.

Perhaps the common thread articulating these submerged connotations of film noir is the often acknowledged one of existentialism, that French development within philosophical phenomenology which became increasingly radicalized around issues of race and Otherness following Sartre's encounter with Fanon.² Questions about the existential proclivities of noir have haunted its critical reception from the outset. But the link needs to be clarified. It is not merely that the Hollywood-starved French cinephiles of the 1950s saw these films as illustrating a contemporary national theory of Being; it is also that a select group of marginal US filmmakers, in the process of vulgarizing some prestigious European theories (including Freudianism), burrowed unselfconsciously into the truth

1 See Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumerton, *Panorama du Film Noir Américain 1941–1953* (Paris: Éditions du Minuit, 1955), and Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: an Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 112–13.

2 See Fredric Jameson's remarks on Fanon, Sartre and European racism in his *Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 356.

content of at least one of them: namely, existentialism's incipient relation to racial politics, which in the history of France at the time was sharpened by the process of decolonization and the emerging Algerian crisis. In this essay, I want to elaborate upon this hypothesis by exploring the complex field of determination in which film noir appeared

Race relations vary dramatically between national situations, though they invariably crystallize the form of a national identity. Etienne Balibar has proposed that racism and nationalism are connected, not by a relation of mechanistic or expressive causality, but by the 'historical articulation' of dialectical 'opposites'.³ In light of this, one will want to ask how it is that US nationalism, which always prides itself on the principle of democratic equality, has been articulated with a racism as systematic as the slavery on which the nation was built. How otherwise, for instance, could President Bill Clinton have responded to the historic Million Man March of 1995 with the words: 'Racism may be suffered by the minorities, but it's *our* problem'? This telescoping of the voice of the President, the audience of white liberals and, by extension, the (white) nation itself, symptomatically excludes from national identity the very 'minorities' at whom the regard of the utterance is directed. That the construction of US national identity can still function so clearly according to an internalized us/them dichotomy should not surprise us, since this logic has haunted post-Civil War America with the pervasive duplicity of *mauvaise foi*. It is a logic which not only defines blackness paradoxically as both American and not-American, but which also shapes the self-image of whiteness, as its racial other is introjected in the very motion of being repelled from view.

Across the fault-line between US nationalism and white racism a double movement of representation articulates these opposites: the white subject recognizes the black object which, in so far as it is an intolerable scandal (an aporia) within the constitutional myth of democracy, must be banished from consciousness – a banishment which brings white identity into higher, if more precarious, definition. By and large (and this is true even of Clinton's brief comment), the moment of recognition involves an identification with the black other's suffering. But this identification is spurious, for it involves no commitment, in turn, to seeing oneself as another. Instead the other's suffering is, as it were, hijacked and exploited for the purposes of extracting white potency from it: they suffer, we are responsible; they await, while we administer justice.

In her account of the first Rodney King verdict in April 1992, Judith Butler examines this play of representation in some depth. She suggests that the all-white Simi Valley jury was persuaded to identify with the camera, with the police brutalizers, and finally with King himself:

3 Etienne Balibar 'Racism and nationalism', in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein *Race Nation, Class Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London Verso, 1991), p. 50

... King himself, but whitewashed: the blows he suffers are taken to be the blows they would suffer if the police were not protecting them from him. Thus the physical danger in which King is recorded is transferred to them; they identify with that vulnerability, but construe it as their own, the vulnerability of whiteness, thus refiguring him as the threat. The danger that they believe themselves always to be in, by virtue of their whiteness. . . . This completes the circuit of paranoia: the projection of their own aggression, and the subsequent regarding of that projection as an external threat.⁴

4 Judith Butler 'Endangered/ endangering schematic racism and white paranoia', in Robert Gooding-Williams (ed.) *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (London Routledge, 1993) p 19

I am suggesting that this definitive *glissade* of 'us' and 'them' defines the specific US form of nationalist, white/black racism. It has affected not merely the outcome of some recent notorious criminal cases, but the entirety of US culture, from its origins as a slave-holding society to the present-day postindustrial behemoth. White America is ceaselessly cajoled into reading the black body as the site of its most potent threat, whereas that body is in fact the bearer of the displaced violence of whiteness itself, which must then be absolved from guilt by a reactive valorization of white over black. Nor is this a merely marginal or incidental feature of national cultural history. Toni Morrison has argued that, in all, 'the literature of the United States has taken as its concern the architecture of the new white man'.⁵ By this last phrase she means the progressive realization of white maleness in narrative representation, mediated through negative figures and tropes of blackness in various stages of abasement and malevolent physicality.

5 Toni Morrison *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992) pp 14–15

I want to show that some such process is equally (though not explicitly) at work in film noir. The most significant achievement of this cycle of films was to have invented (principally in the person of Humphrey Bogart) a new kind of character, a *new white man*, whose existential gravity, misogyny and hard-boiled cynicism cohered into a new and arresting paradigm of American identity (from which African-Americans are perforce excluded, and to which the French intellectuals of the period were inordinately attracted). Yet precisely because of the exaggerated volatility of this new subject – particularly in relation to its structural anti-type, the *femme fatale* – it invariably performs more than the embittered petit-bourgeois misanthropy that is its manifest content. In effect, it comes dangerously close to exhibiting explicitly the logic of US racism we have just rehearsed, and so clears room for the critique of that logic, not only extrinsically, in the autonomous field of critical discourse, but within the evolving form itself. As B. Ruby Rich has recently written, 'Race may have been virtually absent from the first round of noir but it has a singular capacity to reinvigorate the noir form'.⁶ In order to interrogate this 'singular capacity – the tendency of film noir to turn around on its originary absence (that is, its political

6 B. Ruby Rich 'Dumb lugs and femmes fatales: *Sight and Sound*, vol 5 no 11 (1995), p 12

unconscious) – I wish to position the cultural production of this *new white/noir man* within an articulated sequence of socially produced spaces. It is these spaces which overdetermine the *existentiality* of the paradigmatic noir protagonist, who can then be thought of as little more than a characterological vehicle who steers us through them.

Arranging these spaces in an ascending scale of social magnitude – as a series of Russian dolls – they will be approached in the following order: firstly, the chronotopic, representational space of films noirs themselves; secondly, the space of postwar US urbanism (of which the films were, largely, cultural revisions); thirdly, the postcolonial space of France; and lastly, our own space of global, multinational capitalism, of postmodernism in general, which has revived and reimagined the noir chronotope for its own purposes, and in the process forced us to rethink its social symbolism. My argument is that the dialectical unity of these spaces constitutes a contradictory force field in which film noir – an intensely unstable cultural form – can be seen to unpack its racial unconscious.

Chronotope: streets

Beginning, then, with the chronotope itself, our first obligation is to define this possibly obscure literary-critical term. In the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, a ‘chronotope’ is the peculiar knot of devices in narrative representation wherein time ‘thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible’, and space ‘becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history’.⁷ Bakhtin himself unearths a whole genealogy of such chronotopes, from the most ancient novels to multiple variants of the modern form. His point is that chronotopes, concrete images of social time–space, or historico-geographical livedness, vary according to cultural, social and historical situation; that they serve definite social ends by drawing cognitive maps for subjects to orient themselves within their own changing social space. Within the evolving representational medium of cinema, film noir marks the appearance of a distinct urban chronotope in US culture. Vivian Sobchack has remarked that noir establishes an unprecedented structural opposition between private space and rented space:

The diacritical contrast that structures film noir . . . is between the impersonal, discontinuous rented space of cocktail lounge, nightclub, hotel, and roadside café, on the one hand, and the familiar, unfragmented secure space of domesticity on the other. The noir chronotope has no room for children or for rituals of family continuity. . . . The characters generated by this chronotope are transient, without roots or occupation, in a world where murder

7 Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Forms of time and chronotope in the novel’, in *The Dialogical Imagination* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84

8 Unpublished manuscript, quoted in Fred Pfeil 'Home fires burning: family noir in *Blue Velvet* and *Terminator 2*' in Joan Copjec (ed.) *Shades of Noir: a Reader* (London and New York: Verso 1993), pp. 229–30

is more natural than death. The chronotope of film noir . . . perversely celebrates the repressed hysteria of a postwar cultural moment when domestic and economic coherence were fractured, spatializing and concretizing a 'freedom' at once attractive, frightening, and ultimately illusory.⁸

In the tension of this opposition, the once inviolable spatial seme of 'the home' is negated, driven under and deconstructed by the lurid commodification of the public sphere that started during the USA's postwar economic miracle. In this sense, what the noir chronotope allegorizes for us is the *privatization of public life*. The opposition between a perilous, alluring commercial space and a staid, static domestic space – and the traffic of characters between them – is one way of concretely imagining the otherwise unthinkable transplantation of private being (desire, drive) from its classical 'home' in the bourgeois house to the thoroughly commodified urban lifeworld of late capitalism, which thrives on this decentering.

Yet something is missing from Sobchack's otherwise illuminating analysis. For surely the dominant spatial seme of film noir is neither domesticity nor 'rented space', but the roads, streets and alleys which circulate balefully like a clotted arterial infrastructure, draining bodies from their suburban houses (recall the fatal car-bomb in *The Big Heat* [Fritz Lang, 1953]) and delivering them to the various offices, gambling houses, diners, nightclubs and hotel lounges, for pleasure and/or death. It is these most often nocturnally shot urban corridors which organize the noir chronotope into an integrated system of spaces and flows of time. They form an (albeit creaking) hinge between Sobchack's diacritically opposed rented/domestic spaces. Indeed, what most strike us about the noir street scene are its 'gothic' overtones: its romantic tendency to accelerate narrative action in an opaque milieu around classical adventure-tropes, such as chase and pursuit; its dereliction and evident decay; and above all its quintessential emptiness, the extent to which it has been drained of all other life than that of the protagonist and his pursuers, the sinister way it echoes to the lonely tones of the lead actor's obligatory voiceover.

Now, while it might appear obvious that this noir space–time is focalized on a masculine subject position – the hard-boiled anti-hero, whose mission or quest demands his negotiation of all three spatial semes of the chronotope – it remains to be seen where and how the feminine is inserted in the spatio-temporal force field, and what the dynamic is of the relation between masculine and feminine. I want to suggest that the feminine in film noir (the often discussed *femme fatale*) is less a kind of character-type in its own right, than a peculiar form of imperative with regard to subjectivity in general: namely, a revolt against the older sexual admonitions of bourgeois patriarchy and an invitation to pleasure for pleasure's sake. Or, to

put it another way, the feminine of noir is the crucible in which the classical bourgeois domestic economy is liquidated and public space (Sobchack's rented space: the civil sphere) is transubstantiated into an abstract arena for the pursuit of private pleasure. Although the women of film noir occupy domestic and rented space with equal indifference (think of the otherwise polarized Dietrichson home and generic supermarket in *Double Indemnity* [Billy Wilder, 1944], each of which Phyllis Dietrichson seems to haunt like a primal urge), in their presence every space is privatized, disposed for the libidinal economy of the protagonist. The point is that these women 'hoard *jouissance*', and entertain it even inside the sacred walls of home.⁹ Their lust for satisfaction concentrates the crass importunings of an emergent consumer society into a single sideways glance, or flash of stockinged calf. Between them, the noir hero and the *femme fatale* construct a historically new social contract, committing themselves and the public they represent to ever-greater amounts of private enjoyment in the spaces once reserved for civil society, and damn the consequences.

As far as this chronotope is concerned, however, one comment is unavoidable. Noir women simply do not belong in noir's street space, which remains paradigmatically masculine and threatening in a very different sense, and which must then bear a peculiar kind of existential burden given its lack of the feminine which elsewhere orchestrates the spectrum of noir effects. Indeed, I want to argue that this relative exclusion of the feminine from street space (or everyday space) points to the possibility that noir's systematic misogyny is in fact an elaborate feint, an alibi for another 'crime'. I have already recommended that women in film noir are not to be read as 'women' in any literal sense (any number of vulgar interpretations relating noir paranoia to women's employment during and after the War must simply be laid aside), but as allegorical figures for a new consumerism; but I also wish to postulate that they should be seen as surrogate figures for African-Americans, whose growing presence on the streets of New York, Los Angeles and Chicago was a far more likely source of the 'fear and hatred' that is spread over the noir chronotope like an impenetrable fog.

To substantiate such an outrageous proposition, the promised transition to another scale of space will have to take place. But not before insisting, again with Balibar, that sexism and racism are so intimately connected as to be inextricable. 'In other words, it is not in practice simply the case that an "ethnic racism" and a "sexual racism" exist in parallel; racism and sexism function together and in particular, racism always presupposes sexism.'¹⁰ When, in a modern cultural form, a series of effects is discernible that are indubitably sexist, therefore, racism cannot be altogether absent, even if it is not 'visible'. I am proposing that the representation of antagonistic sexual relations in film noir serves as a 'manifest content' behind

9 Joan Copjec, 'The phenomenal nonphenomenal private space in film noir', in *Shades of Noir* p. 193

10 Balibar, 'Racism and nationalism', p. 49

which what I am going to call a racial unconscious can be seen to determine certain symptomatic effects. Noir's excessive sexism suggests an illegitimate subtext of racist polemics which, I am arguing, is alluded to by the absence of women from the spatial scene of the street. It is an absence which masks another, deeper absence. The absence, that is, of black citizens from noir's 'everyday' space, a repression from the space of representation as definitive and determinate as any in the history of what Toni Morrison calls 'American Africanism'

Cities

If 'race' is an absence in original film noir – if black Americans are not represented – then this absence contradicts the prodigious growth of the black presence in the cities themselves. Under the stimulus of the USA's industrial armament for war, hundreds of thousands of Southern African-Americans migrated north and west during the mid 1940s, both to escape the Jim Crow South, and to find work in the munitions factories, aircraft plants and shipyards in the metropolitan industrial centres. Nor did this intra-continental pattern of migration cease after the War, given the demand for labour in the boom economy inaugurating the brief 'American century', and the persistence of Southern bigotry. But this black influx to the conurbations of New York, Chicago, Detroit and Los Angeles was not matched by an integrationist housing policy in any of the city halls. The more blacks who came to the cities, the less space they had to occupy. Deed restrictions, naive public housing initiatives and pervasive racist intolerance all contributed to the impaction of black communities in small and impoverished ghettos.

Simultaneous with this expansion and concentration of the urban black working class was a national strategy to house returning white veterans and their families in new suburban communities at the urban peripheries. A systematic push to suburbanization after the War – backed by the Federal Housing Administration, and enshrined in the Housing Act of 1949 – led to an 'abandonment of the cities' by the upper tiers of the white working class and the white middle class in toto.¹¹ The loss of tax money to city centres consequent with this white flight entailed the neglect of much of the urban infrastructure: transit, maintenance, decent policing and basic services. Meanwhile, apart from impregnable financial fortresses, select commercial enterprises subsisted within the core urban spaces, catering to an increasingly mixed clientele, but newer forms of 'neighbourhood' shopping – the strip mall, most obviously – were competitively introduced to induce suburban consumers to keep money away from the downtowns.

The noir chronotope clearly manifests a degree of anxiety at this

¹¹ See David Reid and Jayne L. Walker 'Strange pursuit: Cornell Woolrich and the abandoned city of the forties' in Copjec (ed.), *Shades of Noir* pp. 57–96

urban revolution, while keeping markedly silent about its racial element, or *segregation*. The anxiety has to do with a real and rapid alienation: the alienation of the white petit-bourgeoisie from their spatial basis, the retail and service sector of urban downtowns. Clearly, Sobchack's 'diacritical contrast' between home and rented space stages this alienation in terms of a binary opposition which privileges the 'sexy' spaces of a residual, die-hard urban, white lower-middle class (including, of course, the various metropolitan police forces), over the newer forms of suburban domicility. But this apparent 'privileging' (rented space is more attractive than domestic space) is nevertheless also strictly cautionary and moralistic, since the allure of the commercial spaces in the old city centres most often leads to violent death or a bitter, haunted existence. The ultimate point of the chronotope would seem to be, as Dean MacCannell has argued, that 'no one would actually want to live in the imagined proletarian and subproletarian space of film noir', and this, perversely, is 'precisely the basis for its attraction'.¹²

¹² Dean MacCannell, 'Democracy's turn on homeless noir', in Copjec (ed.), *Shades of Noir* p. 280

MacCannell's point rests, however, on a deeper appreciation of the spatial seme left out of Sobchack's analysis. For it is the gothic inflection of noir's street space which truly confirms the chronotope's negative stance with regard to everyday life in the postwar US city. These run-down, dark, mean and empty streets resound with the fear and hatred of a race/class faction that has lost its hold over them. The anger and bewilderment of the protagonists as they run along these avenues, casting nervous glances into every niche and side-alley, is as much an expression of bereaved loss as it is of haunted terror. But what if the fear and hatred of this 'new white man' were not an 'in itself'? What if, returning to the observations of Judith Butler and our argument about racial construction in the USA, this very particular effect of film noir were the product of a complex projection and appropriation of a racial aggression that remains subliminal at the level of representation?

It is at this point that the sexism addressed earlier becomes crucial as an index of the barely repressed racial structuration of noir's new white man. The production of capitalist urban space in postwar America rests inalienably on a racist and sexist distribution of power and population: the creation of a new, racialized black lumpenproletariat; the formation of new white working-class catchment areas and managerial hinterlands in overnight 'counterurban' suburbs, the commodification of the lifeworld; the vigorous top-down (and reactionary) reassertion of the propriety of a patriarchal domestic economy; and so on. In order to visualize something of this momentous reconfiguration of public and private life, film noir projected a subject-position for which the whole process was an abstract catastrophe: the hard-working white guy suddenly caught up in intrigues and machinations beyond his understanding, running simply to keep up with the pace of events.

The *femme fatale*, as the embodiment of the apparent arbitrariness of such fate, then stands in allegorically for all of its several elements. Her absence from noir's streets, as we have suggested, betokens a strong taboo on looking too closely at what the other face of her allegorical coin might be in this space: the black face of the new masses of urban African-American poor who were actively transforming the 'abandoned' streets of the inner city into vibrant counter-cultural spaces.

Anything but 'lonely' in contemporary reality, then, the existential void of film noir's lonely streets depends upon a repression of that black quotidian sphere. The process I want to evoke in this representational dialectic is something of this order: black urban everyday life is necessarily 'seen', and seen to be a spreading, threatening tissue of systematic deprivations and counter-cultural affirmations; it is then repressed from view as it contradicts national mythologies of democracy; the existential qualities of the 'scene' are nevertheless retained and harnessed by the subject of vision for his own convenience, to enhance his own authenticity and depth as an alienated social agent. The chronotope of film noir is a product of this representational dialectic. Its street spaces are the site of a determinate repression; yet this repression is far from perfect. Indeed, what could be more symptomatic than the cinematography with which the streets are brought in to vision? The much-praised chiaroscuro stylistics might be reconsidered as a visual tic through which noir's racial unconscious declares itself. The high-contrast separation of the frames into vast pools of urban darkness counterpointed by flickering fields of white light and skin can surely be understood as a reified confrontation of abstract racial entities. Nor should the common, pulsing background aural accompaniment of jazz be too innocently understood; since in films such as *The Blue Dahlia* (George Marshall, 1946) and *D.O.A.* (Rudolph Mate, 1950) this 'atmospheric' feature emerges from the shadows directly to challenge the stability of white male identity.

Let me summarize my argument to this point. The production of space requires the synchronous production of subjectivities able to inhabit that space.¹³ What we have been calling 'chronotopes' are precisely the means cultures have for producing subjectivities commensurate with their social spaces and times. Film noir offers the chronotope of a particular social grouping at a pivotal moment in the production of US urban space, responding symptomatically but originally to the very juncture at which the great US cities were being disarticulated by a logic of suburbanization and consumerism. Film noir seeks to produce a subjectivity, a new white man, able to withstand the shocks of this urban transformation. In order to do so, however, it exploits the figurative and narrative resources of misogyny – not only to dramatize a tension between traditional and consumer society, but also to displace a more profound racial

13 Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space*, trans Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford Blackwell, 1991)

antagonism from conscious expression. The direct expression of that racism would be impossible, given the US national ideology, and the general liberalism of the filmmakers themselves. But the delirious and often hysterical spatial sense of the streets in noir points to this racial unconscious in complex ways: the jazz score; the chiaroscuro, black/white cinematography; the 'dark', 'black', 'night' and 'shadow' of the films' instantly recognizable titles, in which the streets are shot; the suggestive absence from them of *femmes fatales*; their pervasive threat; their absolute emptiness and the concomitant conspicuousness of the white male as he scurries along them.

Film noir's resonance with its minority public drew on a repressed network of well-nigh hysterical fantasies about black occupation of the inner cities; an existential fear appropriated from the black immigrants themselves, then turned against the wall of darkness encircling the closed monad of white subjectivity. 'I feel all dead inside', cries the protagonist of *The Dark Corner* (Henry Hathaway, 1946). 'I'm backed up in a dark corner and I don't know who's hitting me' In Judith Butler's analysis of the Rodney King trial, the subject-position of the white jury is precisely this quintessential noir one: a collective white reappropriation of the very fear they instil in the black population, the very violence they inflict on its members. If noir refrains from pointing the finger directly at African-Americans, and offers more 'acceptable' targets (women, Communism), it is because the entire noir effect depends upon that primary repression. And it is here that the value of noir paradoxically inheres, in this incessant circling around a cause that is at once absent and diffused throughout its field of representation. As Althusser might have said, noir's value lies in its symptomatic tendency to offer answers that do not correspond to any question posed. In order to see that these answers do emerge, I shall move rapidly to the two final spaces under consideration.

French connections

It was the French reception of these films which enshrined them as aesthetically and philosophically respectable. Our very brief treatment of the decolonizing space of postwar France must account for this acclamation and infusion of intellectual prestige. I will suggest that it is in the homology between the USA's and France's immersion in a new and ubiquitous commodity sphere, on the one hand, and the disparity between US and French racisms (shaped by slavery and colonialism respectively), on the other, that we can divine the French investment of cultural respect for a low-budget and unpretentious US film cycle. Henri Lefebvre, Roland Barthes and Kristin Ross¹⁴ have been the most flexible and innovative thinkers of the commodification of everyday life in French culture. The overnight

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso 1991); Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957); Kristin Ross *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996)

proliferation of cheap and glossy consumer goods, from televisions to package tours, transformed urban existence from mere demographic density to an extravaganza of commercial signification and seduction. US film noir in this context clearly figured as a dialectical expression of this context's constitutive dynamics, simultaneously exploring the vertiginous excitements of a collapsing public/private split, and exposing this situation to the critique of a 'dark' mood and unromantic narrative resolutions.

Nevertheless, film noir spoke to more than this incipient postmodern consciousness. For in the figure of its new white man, it provided in pre-packaged form a subject-position capable of sealing itself off from the harsh political realities of decolonization, the Algerian war of liberation (after 1954; Borde and Chaumeton released their book in 1955) and the rising settlement of once colonized peoples within French national boundaries. Edward Said's reading of Camus clearly shows the extent to which French anxieties about decolonization affected inwardly the prose and representational economy of even this renowned radical.¹⁵ In which case, the enthusiastic contemporary French reception of film noir (praising the noir form of toughened existential individualism and endowing it with its racially overdetermined name) must be read through this optic, as a gauge of rising fears about immigration, racial otherness and the decomposition of imperialist social norms. As previously suggested, Sartrean existentialism itself should properly be understood as a systematic engagement with the abiding problematic of otherness whose inner relation to the colonial situation Fanon later brought into view. Belmondo's muggish aping of Bogart in *Au bout de souffle* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1959) encapsulates the French fascination for an American cultural icon, a new white man, who seems already to bear within himself all of the rising existential dread about otherness that has yet to be encoded in any acceptable French idiom. The category of film noir arises from this loaded intersection of cultural negotiations within distinct racist-nationalisms.

15 Edward W. Said, *Narrative geography and interpretation*, *New Left Review*, no. 180 (1990), pp. 81–97.

Neo-noir

Yet it is our own space of multinational capitalism and the unprecedented mobility of peoples that finally clarifies for us the social significance of film noir as an index of racial fears. With retrospective wisdom, we can see the evolution of the noir form as a movement towards recognition of (and confrontation with) the very racism on which it was originally founded. Beginning with the watershed film *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Robert Wise, 1959), in which the latent white supremacy of the canonical hard-boiled noir protagonist is at last given bilious expression, within a wider cultural frame of black pride and expression, civil rights and agitation, film

noir could never again be unselfconscious about its racial subtexts. Certainly, later incarnations of the form – after the significant hiatus of the 1960s, and the political metacommentary of the 1970s (*The Long Goodbye* [Robert Altman, 1973], *Chinatown* [Roman Polanski, 1974]) – have from time to time disambiguated the racial unconscious of the original chronotope. With *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), noir cross-fertilized with science fiction only to retrace its own underpinnings more arrestingly in the film's representation of street space. The new wave of immigration from the Asian continent to Los Angeles, in the form of an aggressive urban petit-bourgeoisie, is here given explicit focus rather than abstracted into an undifferentiated background. *Blade Runner's* streets are alive with an ethnic otherness that is at once threatening and exhilarating.

More significantly still, the recent films of Carl Franklin perform the historical feat of 'expropriating the expropriators', critically reversing the phenomenological current of noir. In his *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) the street spaces of black everyday life in postwar Los Angeles are celebratorily disinterred from the black box into which they were driven by the repressive psychology of the initial noir cycle. This unexpected reinvention of the bodies, subculture and streetscape that had been conjured out of view by the earlier films suddenly demands a reinvestigation of the whole representational mechanism whereby their 'paranoid' effects were secured. And at the same time, Franklin reappropriates for the 'invisibilized' black subject the precise fusion of fear and hatred that had been forcefully transferred to noir's new white man by that representational logic. That this existential complex of the black subject was a historical reality, and not the invention of retrospective revision, is testified to memorably by the literary productions of Chester Himes (*If He Hollers Let Him Go* [1945] and *Lonely Crusade* [1950]), whom radical Los Angeles historian Mike Davis has claimed for the noir tradition.¹⁶

It is not, of course, that 'racism' as a general content was missing from the original noir cycle; the more specific point is that black/white racism was absent. Antisemitism and chauvinism/sympathy for the Chicanos appeared periodically to galvanize certain racial effects within the overall circuitry of noir paranoia. But the recent efforts of Carl Franklin (and the crime literature of Walter Mosley and James Ellroy, in very different ways) have taught us to re-examine the critical silence of noir with regard to black/white politics. This laying bare of the racial unconscious in film noir is determined by a further cunning of reason. Within our global space of instantaneous exchange and incessant circulation, cultural forms undergo an unprecedented degree of reconfiguration according to site-specific contingencies and the absence of a viable universal. Forms once meant to respond to specific national or urban problems (and destined for a limited export market), now circulate

¹⁶ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990) pp. 43–4.

around an incalculable web of interpretive communities. The sheer weight of unwonted connotational pressure thus brought to bear on them causes them to implode (or deconstruct, to put it another way). This exorbitant reading then affects cultural production in the present, as forms are re-read and reproduced in the light of everything that has been learned about them. Film noir cannot sustain a political unconscious in an age of global television markets, video tape, media instruction, multinational distribution companies and an interminable run of remakes.

The other moment within this dialectic is the attitude of black viewers themselves to film noir. Relative to other, established Hollywood genres like the musical, the Western, science fiction, horror or screwball comedy, noir at least offered black spectators an image of their own environment, coloured by their own experience, even though that experience was grafted onto white models of identity. It was 'realistic', then, in both an extrinsic and emotional sense, satisfying the African-American viewer with an alienated figuration of his or her own fear and hatred for city living. Yet film noir cannot but have suggested to the black audience – given their virtual absence from it – its own basis in racism, and so generated a logical resistance along those lines. So much is attested to by the black poet, Wanda Coleman, for whom noir is at once a potent cultural resource for her brand of urban realism, and a disturbing reminder of the inalienable connection between aesthetics and racism throughout US culture:

Nothing cinematic excites me more than film noir. Five minutes of the grainy black-and-white genre thrills me more than any contemporary first-run flick. But . . .

She next describes the sickening appearance of black stereotypes in the visual field of later film noir.

Theirs is a world of ethnic caricature, bit players always peripheral to the action. They suggest that the progress made by today's Afro-American filmmakers, and others outside the movie business mainstream, is still too painfully little, coming far too late, despite the best efforts of the current generation of filmmakers like Charles Burnette, Spike Lee, John Singleton, Julie Dash, Bill Duke, Mario Van Peebles, et al.

The past can't be undone, and these worn stereotypes are disturbing and important reminders that movies, considered purely entertainment, do, over time, become socio-political documents. That, like murder, the racist cultural subtext will out.¹⁷

Although Coleman's reading of noir depends on a more conventional racial reading (the general presentation of black stereotypes) than my own (the absence, in the first phase of noir, of African-Americans from representations of everyday life), her point

17 Wanda Coleman *Native In a Strange Land: Trials and Tremors* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press 1996) pp 160–61

is essentially valid. The 'racist cultural subtext', or what I have tried to call the racial unconscious, of film noir is in the process of unpacking itself. In the hands of a new wave of black filmmakers, the social and psychological energies thereby released are being harnessed to a progressive black urban imaginary. This transfiguration of the original chronotope radically alters our perceptions of the initial film cycle, which can no longer be naively understood as reflective of an unspecified postwar 'angst', but which must be seen as participating in the American–Africanism that Toni Morrison has taught us to recognize at the heart of US culture. That 'participation', however oblique and refracted, positively distinguishes film noir from other cinematic genres and styles of the period in the uncomfortable proximity it assumes to the continuity of a US racist identity. This proximity is dialectical. In the act of confirming a new white male subjectivity, it simultaneously undermines it and exposes it to its own immanent critique.

Raising Caine in a down Eden: *Menace II Society* and the death of Signifyin(g)

JAMES MCKELLY

‘Son, you got to go . . . I want you out of here tonight. I’ve done all I can do for you. We’ve tried our best to raise you. But *you’re bad*.’ With these words Caine Lawson (Tyrin Turner), the narrator and protagonist of Allen and Albert Hughes’s film *Menace II Society* (1993), is cast out of his grandfather’s house. The language screenwriter Tyger Williams has chosen for the scene, as well as the name the Hughes brothers have chosen for their protagonist, explicitly link this character and his narrative with another myth of delinquency very prominent in both the African–American cultural imagination and that of America as a whole. The biblical story of Eden serves as a culturally archetypic parable concerning the social relation of power, knowledge, disobedience and identity. The Eden of Genesis is a garden uttered into being by the Word of the Father. In it, humankind resides in utter concord with this Word, flourishing in the obedience that is the result of innocence. In effect, it is a hermetically – and hermeneutically – sealed symbolic order, in which there exists no discrepancy between the Word of absolute authority and the subject whispered into subsistence by it. Plenitude equals ignorance. Not only is critique impertinent, it is literally unthinkable.

In its tempting of humankind to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, it is the serpent who denatures the stupid bliss of the garden: ‘God knows that as soon as you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods knowing both good and evil’.¹ the

1 Genesis 3:5

2 Genesis 3:22–4

Lord drives Adam and Eve out 'to the East of the garden of Eden' to prevent precisely this eventuality.² Eden's central prohibition, then, masks a power relation. Adam and Eve's partaking of the fruit of knowledge – the symbolic defiance of a moral authority concealing latent self-interest – demonstrates the achievement of an autonomous subjectivity (for better or worse) by means of a break with this authority. In this sense their 'sin' is authentically 'original'. This defiant moral agency disrupts the equivalence of the Word of the Father and the subject whose identity resides solely in the Word, and threatens to subvert with difference the hitherto unproblematic *logos* of the Father's hegemony 'The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; what if he now reaches out his hand and takes from the tree of life also, eats it and lives for ever?'³

3 Genesis 3:22

Genesis, of course, also chronicles the expulsion of Cain, the nominal antecedent of the Hughes brothers' protagonist. Like his parents, the biblical Cain poses a threat to the symbolic order of a jealous god. Cain's murder of his brother Abel is an angry response to the Lord's arbitrary, cryptic⁴ repudiation of his gift in view of the Lord's equally arbitrary favouring of Abel's. Whereas his parents violated the central prohibition which gave structure to the paradise of the Lord's moral hegemony, Cain's sin is to refuse to accept the unarticulated, apparently capricious judgement which unjustly subordinates him to his brother in the eyes of absolute authority. Adam and Eve sin against the Word and are exiled East of Eden into labour and *de facto* suffering; Cain sins against the Law and is exiled East of Eden into futility and *de jure* wandering. Cain is down by law, and marked as such. He's 'bad'.

4 Robert Davidson, 'Genesis 1–11' in P.R. Ackroyd, A.R.C. Leane and J.W. Packer (eds) *The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) p. 52

In Genesis, then, East-of-Eden is mythologically inscribed as a delinquent milieu in which punishment – in the Foucauldian sense of the term – is meted out to the morally transgressive subject:

Punishment . . . is not intended to eliminate offenses, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them; that it is not so much that they render docile those who are liable to transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in a general tactics of subjection.⁵

5 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p. 272

Cain's curse demonstrates exactly the disciplinary ends Foucault outlines. The mark of Cain, ostensibly applied for the purpose of protecting him, effectively serves to distinguish him as a transgressor. The wandering which is the consequence of his curse assures his distribution. These conditions together assure his use to Eden, as both an unmistakable admonition from, and a compelling justification for, the morally unassailable mechanism of domination, naturalized as 'paradise' and 'lost' (that is, unmasked) in what theology has termed the 'fall'. East-of-Eden is therefore 'directly useful'⁶ to Eden in that it at once both designates and circumscribes the figure 'immorality' – the ontologically determinate 'bad' of Caine's

6 *Ibid.* p. 278

7 Ibid

grandfather's curse – against which the figure 'morality', and the particular set of naturalized values and behaviours which consists in it, may be defined and disseminated. Eden needs its East, 'a concentrated, supervised, and disarmed illegality'⁷ in order to perpetuate and promote its hegemony more thoroughly and less blatantly. Thus the East functions metonymically as the culturally marginalized stomping-ground of the 'immoral' Other, the menace to society from which the dominant social derives the luxury of its righteous status.

In several ways, South Central Los Angeles as depicted by the Hughes brothers resembles this delinquent, 'directly useful' East. The few glimpses of black-white interaction presented in the film demonstrate the utility of a black criminal underclass to existing racist economic and social hierarchies. For example, in one scene an intimidated, fearful white lackey in the middle of Watts tries to place an order with the gangsta Chauncy (Clifton Powell) for the theft of a particular car in a particular condition for a 'legitimate' insurance company. Although the irony of the request is not lost on Chauncy – 'What, are you scared to come through this neighbourhood at night? But not too scared to have a black man steal for your sorry ass. Go back to Westwood where you belong' – it is an offer he cannot refuse, and as long as that remains the case, the corrupt business interests will continue to make the offer. In another sequence, we see Caine purchase another stolen car from a white fence who can assure untraceability because he's 'got a brother at the DMV'. We also see Caine and Sharif stopped by white policemen, cruelly beaten, and deposited in a Latino barrio. Throughout *Menace* we witness the inextricability of criminality and the 'legitimate' institutions of commercial and legal order which at once seek both to enable and control it.

In contrast to this, there are ways in which the Hughes brothers render a South Central that is beyond delinquency, beyond the Eden/East-of-Eden social binomial. As we have seen, in Foucault's model the dominant order cultivates a 'concentrated, supervised and disarmed illegality' which perpetrates 'petty thefts, minor acts of violence, [and] routine acts of lawbreaking'⁸ in order to justify a carceral social organization that 'render[s] the group of men docile and useful'.⁹ One of the distinguishing stylistic features of this illegality is a certain romanticized 'lyricism of marginality [which] find[s] inspiration in the image of the "outlaw"'.¹⁰ Yet there is nothing romantic or lyrical in the vicious cycle of devastation in which *Menace*'s outlaws are caught. There is nothing petty about their thefts, nothing minor about their acts of violence, and nothing routine about their acts of lawbreaking. Although geographically concentrated, the South Central of *Menace* is decidedly not disarmed; hence whatever desperate supervision there is alternates ineffectually between the abusive and the fraudulent. If in the Foucauldian view it

8 Ibid pp 278-9

9 Ibid, p 304

10 Ibid, p 301

is the role of the delinquent East to provide a controlled, docile, culturally marginal immorality whose very opposition to the moral Word of the Father ultimately serves to confirm and legitimate the logic of this Edenic symbolic order, the film's South Central conforms to the formula only superficially.

The Lacanian model of human subjectivity, and in particular the concept of 'extimacy' crucial to it, may offer a theoretical perspective from which we might more exactly and more thoroughly comprehend the complexity of *Menace*'s image of Otherness, as well as the trenchant critique of racist democratic capitalism levelled therein. While this model makes it possible to recognize the power and legitimacy of conflicting systems of moral signification within subaltern communities, at the same time it also allows us to trace the debilitating effects of contradictory master signifiers upon the marginalized subject; a subject whose very psycho-social identification depends upon the ability, somehow, to discover a way of negotiating or, in Henry Louis Gates's rich sense of the term, a way of Signifyin(g) upon, the ineluctable moral polarities with which it is confronted. Lacan allows us to access the pitiless structural intricacy of the film's own menace to liberal humanist society and enables us to evaluate the personal and political implications of this defiant representation

According to Jacques-Alain Miller,¹¹ extimacy expresses the precise relation of the Other to the subject *within* which it is *intimate* rather than marginalized, *interior* rather than exterior. In this extimate relation, 'the most interior has a quality of exteriority',¹² and conversely, the most exterior, the utterly marginalized, has a quality of interiority. The term denotes 'the intimate that is radically other', accordingly establishing the Lacanian unconscious as 'the discourse of [this] other'.¹³ Thus extimacy allows us to reconfigure the relationship between the subject and the Other, the conscious and the unconscious, the symbolized and the resistant, the dominant and the marginalized – the Eden and the East-of-Eden – in such a way that implicates these apparently antinomial psycho-social positions in one another even more profoundly and intimately than does delinquency.

In Lacanian terms, then, Eden can be thought of as the discourse of the Master: a symbolic realm in which the Word of the Father is interpellated without resistance throughout culture, a symbolic order uncompromised by opposition which thereby provides what Mark Bracher calls 'formulas for identity'¹⁴ for all subjects. Eden is pure Ideology, unproblematised by ideologically uncanny knowledge and 'generating a form of subjectivity under which undesirable conditions [ignorance, subalternity, circumscription] seem worthwhile, pleasant, or unavoidable'.¹⁵ Correspondingly, the East-of-Eden, to which apostates are banished for the uniquely unforgivable, original crime of subverting the ordering of knowledge as ordained by the Word of the Father, exists not on the exterior margins of the Eden of the

11 Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Extimité', in March Bracher, Marshall W. Alcorn Jr, Ronald J. Cortnell and Francoise Massardier-Kennedy (eds), *Lacanian Theory of Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), pp. 74–87.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

14 Mark Bracher, Introduction, in Bracher et al. (eds), *Lacanian Theory*, p. 7.

15 Marshall W. Alcorn Jr, 'The subject of discourse: reading Lacan through (and beyond) poststructuralist contexts', in Bracher et al. (eds), *Lacanian Theory*, p. 39.

16 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: an Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge MA and London, UK: MIT Press, 1991), p. 17.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

18 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 159.

19 Žižek, 'The hair of the dog that bit you', in *Looking Awry*, p. 59.

20 Henry Louis Gates, 'Niggaz with latitude', *The New Yorker*, 21 March 1994, p. 146.

Word, but *within* it; no longer its excluded East, but its included, extimate Other.

This Other-Eden, then, performs the role of the Lacanian unconscious, the real of desire characterized by Slavoj Žižek as the 'uncanny voice coming from an indefinite point of absolute proximity'¹⁶ which we hear 'precisely only in dreams'. As Eden's unconscious, the Other-Eden serves as the site where the Word of the Father encounters the real of desire in nightmares; the 'bad dreams' in which its subjects are, like Cain, 'all murderers'.¹⁷ It is therefore also culturally analogous to a version of the Third World which, as Fredric Jameson proposes, the 'First World produces . . . within itself by its own inner dynamic'.¹⁸ If Eden stands for the pervasive symbolic order of racist democratic capitalism presided over by the Word of the Father, then O-Eden stands for the extimate remainder of that hegemonic order, that which has been left unsymbolized by its ideology. It represents the systemically unemployable within Adam-Smith's free enterprise; it is the 'extimate, shadowy' Other¹⁹ of late twentieth-century institutionalized racism. The O-Eden is America's nightmare.

And this is exactly how Caine's narration marks *Menace's* antagonist O-Dog (Larenz Tate) early in the film: 'The craziest nigga alive. America's nightmare: young, black, and didn't give a fuck.' Similarly, Henry Louis Gates has said of *Menace* that 'the film gets at the way the ghetto has become the social equivalent of what scientists refer to as a "black hole"; it's a place where the American id collapses upon itself'.²⁰ O-Dog functions as a radically self-justifying, pistol-packing synecdoche of this collapsing American unconscious, a pre-lapsarian avatar of this Other-Eden.

On the surface, O-Dog is crazy in the same way that Bishop (Tupak Shakur), the paranoid antagonist of Ernest Dickerson's *Juice* (1992), is crazy. In the opening minutes of *Menace*, a scene destined

Menace II Society.
Picture courtesy:
BFI Stills.



to be a classic within the gangsta genre, we see O-Dog murder two Korean convenience store owners for six words: 'I feel sorry for your mother'. Later, we see him murder a neighbourhood base-head desperate for money for five more: 'I'll suck your dick, man'. But even more chilling than O-Dog's deeds themselves is his attitude. The base-head had originally offered him a sack of fast food for some money; after shooting the man, O-Dog holds the bag aloft and, with his face suffused with sincere innocence, calls to his friends down the alley: 'Any of ya'll want a hamburger? What's wrong? Ya'll don't want a hamburger?' Similarly, O-Dog watches the security tape he has taken from the scene of the Korean murders over and over – 'That shit's funny to me' – and talks about it constantly: 'It's all about O-Dog, nigga. I'm larger than that nigga Steven Seagal. I'm going to be a big-ass movie star.'

While Paula Massood dismisses the Hughes brothers' use of the video as 'an innovative means of conveying action' but ultimately 'nothing more than a red herring',²¹ Gates views it as 'the film's most impressive achievement'; 'the film within a film' which 'ultimately implicates us, the audience [in] the uneasy pleasure of the spectacle'.²² Although Gates does not go on to elaborate, he gestures towards one of the film's salient points: in O-Dog we recognize – uneasily – a representative of the dominant culture's enthralled spectatorship of its own horrors. In such a culture, 'video verite' retunes social devastation as *Cops*, while the heli-cams hovering over the white Bronco present domestic devastation as *The Fugitive* and 'news coverage' of the Gulf War gives us imperial devastation as *America's Funniest Videos*. While Terrence Rafferty suggests that the scenes of O-Dog watching his murder tape present 'an indelible image of the hideous emotional deformities that society's lower depths can sometimes produce'.²³ I would rather suggest that the power of the scene, as well as the power of the film in general, is that it depicts the 'hideous emotional deformities' that racist US free enterprise *always* produces. It is an image of late capitalism's nightmare, its estimate Other that is also most deeply itself.

In their reviews of *Menace*, Rafferty and Stanley Kauffmann account for O-Dog's disturbing insouciance by referring to him respectively as 'a pure sociopath'²⁴ and 'a psycho killer'.²⁵ But there is a cultural denial at the heart of these claims, in that, in Edward Guerrero's words, they attribute violent rage 'to the drama of individual weaknesses' and 'to individual pathology, rather than connecting it to the collective determinants of discrimination and social injustice inflicted on an oppressed community'.²⁶ A more cogent interpretation of O-Dog's psychological state arises from the Lacanian notion of psychosis 'a psychotic is precisely a subject who is *not duped by the symbolic order*'²⁷ In other words, O-Dog is 'the craziest nigga alive' insofar as the discourse of the Master – democratic capitalism and all the behavioural prohibitions it imposes

21 Paula Massood, *Menace II*
Society Cinéaste vol 20 no 2
(1993), pp 44–5

22 Gates 'Niggaz with latitude',
p 146

23 Terrence Rafferty 'Dead end'
The New Yorker 31 March 1993
p 161

24 Ibid

25 Stanley Kauffmann 'Menace II'
Society/ New Republic 5 July
1993, p 28

26 Edward Guerrero, *Framing
Blackness the African-American
Image in Film* (Philadelphia
Temple University Press 1993),
p 188

27 Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p 79
(emphasis Žižek's)

upon its subjects – has found no purchase in him. For example, he scorns African-American religious practice: 'I don't think God really cares too much about us or he wouldn't have put us here. I mean, look at where we stay at. . . . Black people got too much damn religion.' In flagrant disregard for the heroic and self-sacrificing loyalty of the Audie Murphy/John Wayne paradigm, he abandons a friend who lies dying in the street: 'Hey man, we gotta do that shit another time. Hey Sharif, that muthafucka dead. He's dead. Fuck that! Let's go!' And when Caine declares that he 'ain't killing no kids or no old folks' in a pay-back drive-by, O-Dog declares, 'Nigga, I'll smoke anybody. I just don't give a fuck.'

In short, in O-Dog the figure 'conscience', that prohibitive psychological trope generated in the subject by the Word of the Father, has lost its coercive power. Thus immunized against becoming one of the 'subjected and practiced bodies' produced by discipline, O-Dog signifies O-Eden's radical subversion of those features of the ghetto that resemble the disciplinary structures of 'the carceral', as Foucault describes them: 'Discipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected place of disciplined monotony'.²⁸ As an estimate heterogeneity, O-Eden refuses the marginalization produced by the moral/immoral social binarism, as an amoral milieu, as America's nightmare, it negates the statutory logic of democratic capitalism.

This is where *Menace* crucially differs from Brian De Palma's *Scarface* (1983), a film that Allen and Albert Hughes acknowledge to have been one of their central cinematic inspirations in creating *Menace*.²⁹ In *Scarface*, Oliver Stone's screenplay presents Tony Montana (Al Pacino) as a figure marginalized by the socioeconomic status quo, who is striving for inclusion, self-creation and identity in the best shady traditions of Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby and Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen. Although the film does accomplish a Foucauldian critique of the role of criminality in corporate capitalism – hence Montana's claim that, 'You need people like me so you can point your fucking fingers and say, "That's the bad guy"' – Montana, like his literary forbears, embodies an almost operatic paean to the personal and cultural values imbricated in what he toasts as 'the land of opportunity'. *Scarface*, therefore, although it ruminates upon the country's lapses, persistently professes a faith in the American Eden. Even the slogan on a blimp flying overhead reminds Montana of his American dream; 'The World Is Yours'. In contrast to this, in the nightmare Other-Eden of *Menace*, the world always belongs to someone else.

Despite the manifest irrelevance of the moral constructions of the American Eden to its extimate Other, the apparently amoral O-Eden – an intersubjective community in its own right – promotes a symbolic order of its own, one which both pragmatically

²⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*
p. 141

²⁹ Gates, 'Niggaz with latitude',
p. 146

30 Mark Bracher, 'On the psychological and social functions of language', in Bracher et al (eds), *Lacanian Theory*, p. 111

acknowledges the moral alterity of the community *vis-à-vis* dominant culture, and provides systems of signification that enable survival within political, economic and social subalternity. And like the dominant symbolic order, this Other order, this 'dys-order', if you will, perpetuates and protects itself by virtue of its own master signifiers, which 'the subject has identified with (or against) and [which] thus constitute a powerful positive or negative value'.³⁰ As *Menace* represents it, the dominant master signifier of the O-Eden, for which O-Dog is the insistent oracle, is the heavily coded figure 'down'. The Hughes brothers take great care to weave into the film's diegetic fabric an exploration of the complexity of the values and behaviours comprised by this culturally pervasive trope. An inversion of the facile camaraderie of suburban youth, 'down' stands for reciprocal self-protection under threat, and it is the constant condition of the O-Eden. Of his cousin Harold (Saafir), Caine reports that 'whenever we were together and some shit popped off, I never had to worry. He had my back and I had his. We were down for each other like that. All the homies was down for each other.' A negation of the Christian instruction to turn the other cheek, an attitude based on the teachings of a figure that Caine calls 'a white Jesus', 'down' stands for a willingness to repay violence with violence: when O-Dog asks Caine if he is 'down with a 1-8-7' to avenge Harold's murder and Caine replies that he's ready, O-Dog exclaims approvingly, 'Yo, you gettin' down, nigga'. As an acceleration past the restraint of conscience, 'down' stands for an acknowledgement of the brutality of the world and the necessity of a ruthless response to it. When Caine expresses reservations about hurting innocent people in the upcoming drive-by, O-Dog explodes:

Nigga you acting like a little bitch right now . . . These muthafuckas smoked your goddamn cousin in front of you, nigga. Blew his head off in front of your face and you ain't gonna do shit? . . . Fuck that. I ain't letting that shit ride. We going to go on in there and smoke all these muthafuckas and I don't give a fuck who the fuck's out there. Is you down, nigga?

And although from the first scene onward *Menace* declares a narrative fascination with O-Dog as the current exemplum of its moral dys-order, the film also concerns itself with the genesis and cultural transmission of this down Eden; with, in other words, how Caine was raised there. And appropriately so: the power over Caine of O-Dog's invocation of the master signifier 'down' rests in its tragic aptitude to his world. By quoting the nightmarish black-and-white documentary footage of the Watts Riots of 1965, *Menace* chronicles the fires of creation which produced this down garden. It also presents Caine's parents, Tat (Samuel L. Jackson) and Karen Lawson (Khandi Alexander), respectively a dealer and an addict, as its primal couple, and those most responsible for acculturating their

31 Mark Bracher *Lacan Discourse and Social Change* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993) pp. 32–4

first-born. ‘Growing up with parents like that’, Caine remembers, ‘I heard a lot, saw a lot, caught on to the criminal life real quick. Instead of keeping me out of trouble, they turned me on to it.’ Cinematographer Lisa Rinzler hauntingly renders the traumatic central image of Caine’s childhood memory of this down socialization, and taps into what Lacan calls the Imaginary order, the reservoir of images, bodily and cultural, that contribute to the child’s pre-verbal (pre-symbolic) subjectification.³¹ In a scene suffused with the surreal red light of a party bulb, the child Caine (Brandon Hammond), still in his pyjamas, watches his father gun down a man during a poker game in the living room. In electronically distorted, elongated, low-register syllables, Tat then calls his son’s name: ‘Caine! Caine! Caine!’. This repeated, antiphonal naming seems to forge a semiotic link between Caine’s identity and the paternal horror he has just witnessed. In a sense, he is fathered by this image.

Through the narrative vehicle of Caine’s memories, *Menace* continues to foreground the more explicit processes of this cultural fathering, the O-Eden’s down symbolization of its subjects; as Caine succinctly puts it, ‘there was shit that couldn’t be learned in no classroom’. He goes on, ‘I learned to make drugs when I was little. Heroin, cocaine. I learned from my dad. It was the only thing he taught me before he was killed.’ After Tat is killed in a drug deal, Caine’s schooling continues via a friend of his father’s. ‘Pernell (Glenn Plummer) looked out for me when things got rough. He taught me things, he showed me what being a hustler was all about.’ Accordingly, we see Pernell seated on the Lawsons’ back stoop during a party, giving Caine his first sip of liquor and teaching the curious boy how to hold a gun. The down loyalty that *Menace* investigates also ensures the passing on of this information through families that eventually will be devastated by its practice. Just as Tat was lost to Caine, Pernell, serving a life sentence, is lost to his son Anthony (Julian Roy Doster). Caine looks after Anthony – ‘he reminds me of me when I was little’ – just as Pernell looked after him. When Anthony asks Caine to show him his gun, Caine complies, against the wishes of Anthony’s mother Ronnie (Jada Pinkett). When Ronnie expresses her anger, Caine defends himself in this way: ‘I’m just showing him how to shoot. Pernell looked out for me. If it wasn’t for him, my black ass would be dead by now. I’m just paying him back.’

For Ronnie, the master signifier ‘down’ constitutes what Bracher calls ‘a powerful negative value’; she identifies herself against it with as much vigour as O-Dog defines himself by it. Perspicacious in a way that Caine’s mother Karen was not, Ronnie sees through to the cycle of social destruction sublated beneath the reciprocal pay-back loyalty to which Caine is devoted, and in which her own son is likely to become entwined: ‘Look’, she replies to Caine,

Fuck Pernell 'cause you don't owe him shit. . . You need to do something with yourself before you end up like he did. . . It ain't even about being down. I've got a son to look after. I look at you and you remind me of how Pernell used to be.

Caine is beginning to resemble Tat as well; in a scene that mirrors his own initiation into traumatic violence, Caine, as Anthony looks on in his pyjamas, brutally pistol-whips Chauncy for making drunken overtures to Ronnie at her party. Later, in an attempt to avoid the fate towards which she sees Caine hurtling (and because she has fallen in love with him) Ronnie suggests that he comes with her to Atlanta, where she has arranged for a job doing office work. In effect, Ronnie is proposing the presence of another, unspoken master signifier, whose semiotic survival in the down Eden is so tenuous that it must conceal itself in quiet kitchens and darkened bedrooms, a tacit intimation. This figure 'hope' is grounded in two related premisses. First, there is the faith that there exists some semiotic space, as it were, in the symbolic order of the American Eden which would comprehend Ronnie, Anthony and Caine in its cultural embrace – the faith that, to paraphrase Stephen Sondheim, there's a place for them. Second, there is the decisive acceptance of the realization that to arrive at this place, they must leave Watts behind, abandoning the extimate amoral logic of the Other-Eden and becoming, therefore, what O-Dog scorns as 'sell-out muthafucka[s]'. It is a testament to the power and currency of O-Dog's 'down' that Caine resists Ronnie's culturally incompatible 'hope' as long as he does: 'Ain't nothing going to change in Atlanta', he says. 'I'm still going to be black, just another nigga from the ghetto. . . You act like Atlanta ain't in America. They don't give a fuck.'

Ronnie is not the only voice of hope in the film; Sharif (Vonte Sweet), whom Caine describes as 'an ex-knuckle-head turned Muslim, so happy to be learning something he liked that he kept coming at us with it', believes that 'Allah could save black people' ('Yeah, right', Caine concludes). Significantly, despite his dedication to the welfare of the community, Sharif also plans to leave South Central with Stacey (Ryan Williams), who is heading to Kansas – over the rainbow – to play football. Even Pernell, whom Caine visits with Ronnie in prison, directly confirms Ronnie's imperative and impugns the down pedagogy in which he played a fatherly role:

Go with Ronnie, Caine. I know how she feels about you and that's cool. . . Take care of my son. I can't do shit for him in here. You teach him better than I taught you. Teach him the way we grew up was bullshit.

Sharif's father Mr Butler (Charles Dutton), whom Caine calls 'the only one who ever came at me like he gave a damn,' gives him

advice which, on the surface at least, offers itself as a tertiary, bottom-line level of value, providing an ultimate justification for leaving 'down' behind and giving himself over to 'hope' as proffered by Ronnie. He says:

What are you going to do, Caine, fuck around on the streets till you get killed like your cousin? What are you going to do if you stay? . . . Whatever changes you have to make, then you just do it. You got to think about your life. Being a black man in America isn't easy. The hunt is on. And you're the prey. All I'm saying is, *all* I'm saying is: survive.

Despite the conclusive clarification it ostensibly offers, however, Mr Butler's simple imperative actually gives voice to a third master signifier, one which inadvertently sets the oppositional master signifiers 'down' and 'hope' even more at odds with one another in Caine's mind than they had been; ironically, it accomplishes this intensification of difference by identifying the root value that they share. As we have seen, for example, it is in the name of 'survival' that O-Dog ordains the existential strategies comprised by the term 'down'. Conversely, in a sort of Möbius equivalence, it is in the name of 'survival' that Mr Butler advocates the changes indicated by 'hope.' The estimate 'down', though clearly confining, allows Caine to remain in his community; the marginalized 'hope', though clearly liberating, means he must be cast from his home. Rinzler and the Hughes brothers beautifully depict the inescapable nature of these confinements-by-choice in a series of reverse shots during Caine's conversation with Pernell. Across the transparent barrier of the prison visiting room we see a shot of the inmate Pernell, caged by the metallic mesh of the reinforced glass, encouraging Caine to leave with Ronnie and Anthony. In the reverse shot we see the free man, Caine, identically framed, peering back through the interstices, incarcerated by the very liberation to which Pernell has just given his blessing.

The symbolic disequilibrium caused by the conflation of 'down', 'hope' and 'survival' marks Caine as an apposite example of the Lacanian 'divided subject', which is characterized above all by 'a failure . . . to coincide with or be satisfied by the master signifiers offered by society and embraced as the subject's ideals'.³² Accordingly, the dispassionate, first-person voiceover narration of the film functions symbolically as Caine's attempt to reconcile, in retrospect, these warring yet paradoxically affiliated signifiers, and thus to narrativize the disparate properties of his character's experience. In the film's *dénouement*, an adeptly edited series of emotionally inchoate flashbacks are interspersed, to the rhythm of a failing heart-beat, with slow-motion, chronologically present images of Caine's murder, thus eventually we realize that this narrative voice has issued from an extinguishing consciousness. One that has

32 Bracher, 'On the psychological and social functions of language' p. 122

been living, so to speak, the death of possibility, and trying to make sense of it, for us and for itself.

In this, *Menace* resembles Rudolph Mate's *D.O.A.* (1950) and Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), two definitive examples of the noir genre. Žižek proposes that these films, narrated as they are by characters in 'the uncanny position' of being 'still alive, yet already marked by death',³³ represent 'a radical split, a kind of structural imbalance, as to the possibility of narrativization. . . . Remembrance is here directly in the service of oblivion.'³⁴ The narrative structure that the Hughes brothers give to *Menace* accomplishes the same ends, casting Caine as a kind of noir detective, 'already dead', trying to 'figure out' the signifying figures that have informed his life. The attempt, despite its aesthetic success as a diegetic device, is always already futile, 'in the service of oblivion'.³⁵ As Caine says: 'I'd done too much to turn back, and I'd done too much to go on. I guess in the end it all catches up with you. My grandpa asked me one time if I cared whether I live or die. Yeah, I do. But now it's too late.'

In addition, his doomed attempt at investigation and resolution associates Caine with Charlie (Harvey Keitel) of *Mean Streets* (Martin Scorsese, 1973), a film to which *Menace* is frequently compared. However, as with each of Scorsese's early films, the animating dramatic tension within *Mean Streets* is a question of morality: how to reconcile the competing demands of two moral worlds. In *Mean Streets* Charlie is torn between two senses of loyalty: to his Other-Eden, the mafia of New York's Little Italy, and to his conscience, that instrument of the conventional order which encourages him to act as 'his brother's keeper' with respect to Johnnie Boy (Robert De Niro). In *Menace*, the Hughes brothers accelerate the complexity and moral contingency of Scorsese's formula. Caine operates among three inextricably associated, yet inherently insoluble, master signifiers, while he is acted upon in different ways by many variously interested influences: Tat, Pernell, his grandfather, Harold, O-Dog, Sharif, Mr Butler, Ronnie and Anthony. Much to the chagrin of the liberal humanist imagination, the role of conscience in the dramatic structure of *Menace* is ancillary at best. Instead, at the centre of *Menace* is this question of survival; not just how to, as proposed by Mr Butler, but *whether* to, as phrased by Caine's grandfather: 'Do you care if you live or die?'

By virtue of his subjective suspension in the zero-gravity semiotic field generated by the figures 'down', 'hope' and 'survival', Caine personifies the Lacanian discourse of the Hysteric, which 'despite its expression of . . . division . . . remains in thrall to master signifiers and a system of knowledge/belief that it has not itself embodied and produced'. It is only through what Lacan designates as 'mythic knowledge' that this culturally overdetermined subject can 'separate

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 188.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 151–2.

³⁵ Massood, 'Menace II Society', p. 44.

36 Bracher 'On the psychological and social functions of language', p. 122

37 Ibid., p. 125

38 Jacques Lacan *Le Séminaire, Livre XVII l'envers de la psychanalyse*, text established by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 127

39 Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xxiii

40 Ibid., p. 70

41 Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 6–7

42 James McKelly, 'The double truth Ruth: *Do the Right Thing* and the culture of ambiguity', *African American Review* (forthcoming)

from the given master signifiers and produce its own new master signifiers', that is, identities and values more integral to its own subjective orientations.³⁶ Mythic knowledge, equivalent to the discourse of the Analyst in Lacanian psychoanalysis, is able to effect this liberation because 'it offers not absolute, clearly established, self-referential identities, but rather a system of oppositions' whose symbolic properties 'offer no unequivocal identities, meanings, or values'.³⁷ Or, as Lacan himself puts it, 'the truth only shows itself in an alternation of things that are strictly opposed, which it is necessary to make turn around each other'.³⁸

If the specific language, processes and effects of mythic knowledge seem familiar to scholars of African-American cultural studies, perhaps this is because in Henry Louis Gates's much-cited book, *The Signifying Monkey*, we are presented with a more literary-theoretical and sociologically tuned version of this knowledge. In this book, Gates describes 'Signifyin(g)' a 'double-voiced utterance'³⁹ which can, he argues, enable *homo rhetoricus Africanus* to navigate the oppositional discursive realms of 'white' and 'black', the warring master signifiers with which a racist culture confronts, and undertakes to identify, all of its subjects. Briefly put, Signifyin(g) functions as the rhetorical trope and interpretive figure by which the African-American consciousness subverts the naturalized rhetorical and social constructions that confine the African-American subject to a circumscribed set of psychological and sociopolitical locations. Through Signifyin(g), the African-American subject is able to dispel the culturally inscribed 'binary political relationship . . . between black and white' as well as critique 'the idea of binary opposition' in general.⁴⁰ Another way of understanding Signifyin(g) is as a kind of blues, a form of artistic cultural practice which, as Houston Baker theorizes it, 'comprise[s] a mediational site' wherein 'familiar antinomies may be . . . dissolved' or receive 'polyvalent interpretations'.⁴¹

In relation to the concept of Lacanian subjectivity in its social correspondences, then, Signifyin(g) can be understood as a culturally intramural form of mythic knowledge, an emancipatory blues composed from within the Other-Eden, sung to thwart the coercive identifications offered by the racist dominant culture to which it is extimate. As I have argued elsewhere, in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), Mookie (Lee) performs precisely this Signifyin(g) blues with astonishing virtuosity.⁴² In the final analysis, however, Mookie more closely resembles Scorsese's Charlie than the Hughes brothers' Caine. While it is true that, like Caine, Mookie is situated among various cultural terms which compete, so to speak, for his identity, in Lee's narrative, as in Scorsese's, these signifiers are configured as much more clearly antinomial, or straightforwardly oppositional. Much like the words on Radio Raheem's gold knuckle rings, 'love' and 'hate', these signifiers are as reciprocally exclusive

as 'black' and 'white.' Mookie works between these polarities, literally an entrepreneur who is riding the rails between two psycho-social extremes. Alienated from both racist US capitalism (as embodied by Sal [Danny Aiello]) and separatist black nationalism (as embodied by Buggin Out [Giancarlo Esposito]); he can Signify on his own bipolar alienation, resisting the binarism.

In the O-Eden as depicted by *Menace*, however, this clarity is absent. Mirroring Jameson's description of recent shifts in the dynamics of cultural pathology, in the Hughes brothers' version of South Central 'the alienation of the subject has been displaced by the latter's fragmentation'.⁴³ The fragmentation of Caine's subjectivity consists not in the conflict generated by a two-sided array of adversarial discursive positions, but in the paralysis generated by a constellation of culturally inextricable psycho-social valences. As we have seen, in Caine, 'survival' has been as strongly linked to 'down' as to 'hope'. He cannot Signify, he can only choose, hoping for the best, but lost in the ubiquity of the worst. When Caine is gunned down in Ronnie's front yard, the Hughes brothers present a dire proposition: that the chaotic jeopardy of life in the Other-Eden is such that the figure 'choice' is itself hopelessly conflicted, and the particular choice, in the end, does not matter. They force us, therefore, to bear witness to the impotence of mythic knowledge, to the irrelevance of the blues, and to the death of Signifyin(g).

Here is where *Menace* enters the cultural debate regarding what James Baldwin called 'the burden of representation'⁴⁴ that is carried by all African-American art. The desire for African-American cinema to provide 'aspirational material for black awareness' dates back to Oscar Micheaux, who insisted that his films 'should uplift the race, not hinder it'.⁴⁵ In his essay 'Nihilism in black America', Cornell West brings the issue up to date, and articulates what is at stake in terms of the psycho-social realities threatening much of contemporary African-American culture. He defines nihilism and its cultural formations as:

the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. This usually results in a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a cold-hearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others.⁴⁶

If, as I have argued, *Menace*'s final scene represents not just the tragic futility but the banal irrelevance of meaning, hope and love in the moral dys-order of an extimate Other-world, the film could be seen to function as a simulacrum of precisely the nihilism West describes (the term appears in one form or another in many of the reviews published in the popular press).⁴⁷ As such, the film violates Kobena Mercer's injunction that African-American art 'must reflect

⁴³ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 14

⁴⁴ Quoted in Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, p. 189

⁴⁵ Karen Ross, *Black and White Media: Black Images in Film and Television* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 60

⁴⁶ Cornell West, 'The new cultural politics of difference' in Steven Seidman (ed.), *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), p. 223

⁴⁷ See David Denby 'Mean Streets', *New York*, 31 May 1993, pp. 54-5, Jeff Giles 'A "menace" has Hollywood seeing double', *Newsweek*, 19 July 1993, p. 122, Arthur Jafa 'Like Rashomon but different: the new black cinema' *Artforum*, vol. 31 (Summer 1995) pp. 10-11

48 Quoted in West 'The new cultural politics' p 72

49 Gates 'Niggaz with latitude' p 146

50 Cornell West, 'Nihilism in black America', *Dissent* vol 38 (Spring 1991) p 221

51 Jafa 'Like Rashamon but different', p 10

52 Amy Taubin 'Girl in the hood', *Sight and Sound*, vol 3, no 8 (1993) p 16

53 Paul Gilroy, 'Flipper Purify and Furious Styles' *Sight and Sound*, vol 1 no 4 (1991), p 10

54 Cited in Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, p 186

55 *Ibid.*, p 186

or mirror the real Black community, not simply the negative and depressing representations of it'.⁴⁸

In contrast to this, John Singleton's *Boyz 'n the Hood* (1991), to which *Menace* transparently constituted an in-your-face cinematic riposte (the Hughes brothers pitched their project as a film that 'would make *Boyz* look like *Mary Poppins*')⁴⁹ does satisfy Mercer's reflectionist criteria on several levels. A kind of ghetto *bildungsroman*, the narrative structure of *Boyz* is overtly sociological, following from childhood to young adulthood the moral and social progress (or decay) of three neighbourhood boys, who are each dealt a different set of parental influences at the start, and who each take different paths along the way. Within this sociological context, *Boyz* is unambiguously prescriptive. As Furious Styles (Lawrence Fishburne) puts it to his son Tre (Cuba Gooding, Jr),

You may think I'm being hard on you right now, but I'm not . . . I'm trying to teach you how to be responsible. Your little friends across the street, they don't have anybody to show them how to do that. They don't. You going to see how they end up, too.

Sure enough, the 'friends across the street', the sons – fathered by different men – of a woman whom the narrative marks as promiscuous and inconsistent in her parenting, both end up gunned down in the street, while Tre, raised by a father who embodies what West has called 'the Protestant ethic – hard work, deferred gratification, frugality, and responsibility'⁵⁰ – concentrates on school, has a part-time job, avoids getting caught up in the violence of gang life, and in the end goes off to Morehouse. In addition, Brandi (Nia Long), the religious girl who gave Tre her virginity, and to whom he has pledged his troth, will be 'across the street at Spelman College'. Although *Mary Poppins* may be an exaggeration, Arthur Jafa is right in declaring that compared to *Menace*, '*Boyz 'n the Hood* look[s] like *The Cosby Show*'.⁵¹

Beyond the 'Hollywood-style sentimentality'⁵² that puts it 'in danger of turning black American life into a set of Hollywood clichés',⁵³ there is another reason why *Boyz* is the most commercially successful black film ever, and why, in the wake of the Los Angeles riots of 1992, Republican governor Pete Wilson recommended that all of California's citizens see it.⁵⁴ It lies in what Guerrero criticized as the film's 'melodramatic devotion to the cult of the enterprising individual (*à la* Horatio Alger) as homeboys are [respectively] rewarded or punished . . . for choices . . . constant with, or in conflict with, dominant values'.⁵⁵ In *Furious Styles* we are given an aggressive, didactic African-American image of the bourgeois virtues of hard work and patriarchal authority. Although he does at one point provide a politically astute critique of the machinations of racist capital, as a self-employed financial consultant Styles nonetheless advocates enthusiastic and self-interested participation in

US free enterprise: 'We need to keep everything in our neighbourhood black. Black owned, with black money. Just like the Jews, the Italians, the Mexicans and the Koreans do.' Like Mookie, like Charlie, like Tony Montana, Furious Styles is an entrepreneur, a businessman. And like Ronnie, he ultimately believes that there is a place for him, as there has been for the members of other immigrant populations, in the economic order of the American Eden. Even (or especially) in his moments of critique, Styles perpetuates the dialectic between the marginalized and the dominant, and in so doing substantiates the egalitarian pretence of democratic free enterprise.

Jean Baudrillard has said that 'all that capital asks of us is to receive it as rational *or* to combat it in the name of rationality, to receive it as moral *or* to combat it in the name of morality. Because *these are the same*'⁵⁶ In other words, the dominant symbolic order that constitutes the social, or the Lacanian Big Other, is composed of a system of significances, of socially endorsed knowledges, which all rely on one another for validation. Any censure of this order on its own terms – terms which comprehend a particular 'rationality' or 'morality' – only serves to strengthen the significance of those terms, and thus supports the fabrication of the symbolic order itself. Therefore in the combat it wages in the name of rationality and in the name of morality, and in the prescriptions for hope it urges, *Boyz* falls into a kind of semiotic complicity with the very order it aspires to indict. In the case of *Menace*, however, it is the film's nihilism that hones the menace with which it threatens this order. In so far as its final images rub out the different kinds of survival offered by the dominant culture, by marginalized culture, or by the culture of ambiguity suggested by the mythic knowledge of Signifyin(g), *Menace* is able to defy the logic of self-help and redemption which the capitalist Eden offers as its moral *apologia*. Instead the scary conclusion indicates that America's nightmare – its extimate unconscious, its Other-Eden – may be a bad dream from which we will never awake.

This conclusion clearly offends the deepest convictions of the liberal humanist *Weltanschauung*. Karen Ross calls *Menace* 'a cynical attempt to exploit the very real problems facing urban black (and white) America without offering a critique beyond futility',⁵⁷ and laments that 'while such films are valuable in providing insights into the experiences of urban black communities and . . . young black men, they are largely desolate in their conclusions'.⁵⁸ But is the representation of desolation and futility not a critically important and profoundly honest insight into the experiences of urban black communities and young black men? Similarly, Terrence Rafferty yearns for 'something more to hold on to', and 'resent[s]' the film for 'tempting' him 'to believe that the circumstances of kids like Caine are so intractable to thought and to art that [the Hughes brothers] are helpless to imagine any other kind of resolution'.⁵⁹ Yet

56 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 15 (emphasis Baudrillard's)

57 Ross, *Black and White Media* p. 76

58 Ibid., p. 82

59 Rafferty, *Dead end* p. 62

is it not our resentment of this devastating information that keeps us from facing our systemic implication in it?

60 West Nihilism in black
America p 225

It is true that *Menace* does not contribute directly to 'the politics of conversion' that West advocates as 'a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle'.⁶⁰ It does, however, accomplish with ruthless courage and precision what he identifies as our long-neglected cultural obligation 'to face up to the monumental eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, and the incredible disregard for human (especially black) life and property in much of black America'.⁶¹ Perhaps *Menace*'s contribution to a politics of conversion, then, is of necessity oblique, bearing as it does news that radically disrupts the long-standing notions of otherness, difference and marginality that have supported the politics of stasis.

61 Ibid p 221

In his discussion of the possible cultural applicability of the Lacanian paradigm, Bracher suggests that,

by exposing the real that the system of signifiers, and particularly the master signifiers, fail to grasp, one can interpellate subjects to an activation of their . . . nonidentity with their master signifiers, and thus create an impetus for the production of new master signifiers.⁶²

62 Bracher On the psychological
and social functions of language,
p 126

I would argue that *Menace* effects this exposure in two important ways. For dominant culture it illuminates the real of racist hegemony, the extimate Other-Eden left unsymbolized by the master signifiers of the American bourgeois paradise; for the extimate culture which *Menace* depicts, the film exhibits the grave dangers of alterity, and warns against the paralysing effect of the Other's Signifyin(g) power that is a consequence of alterity's desperately accelerated forms. In this way, I would argue that the Hughes brothers have provided an impetus for the production of new master signifiers which might, one day, liberate individual subjects into more fulfilling, more humanly generous identities. However, to expect hope from a film which assumes, as its semiotic duty, the representation of hope's Other may be irrelevant. Allen Hughes puts it best: 'We're not here to give people hope. We're here to display what's going on. And if you have a problem, then open your eyes and do something about it. *You* be the hope.'⁶³

63 Quoted in Giles, A "menace" has
Hollywood seeing double, p 52

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of his colleagues Eric Wolfe and Daniel Penick to this project

Foreskin fetishism: Jewish male difference in *Europa, Europa*

JANET LUNGSTRUM

In his films, Chaplin aimed at both the most international and the most revolutionary affect of the masses' laughter

Walter Benjamin¹

It is more comfortable for our eye to react to a particular object by producing again an image it has often produced before than by retaining what is new and different in an impression: the latter requires more strength, more 'morality'.

Friedrich Nietzsche²

Agnieszka Holland's controversial film, *Europa, Europa* (first released in Germany in October 1991 as *Hitlerjunge Salomon*),³ offers an alternative strategy or imaginative logic for sustaining the memory of the Shoah. It presents a true story based on the autobiography of a Jewish youth, Salomon Perel (played by Marco Hofschneider), who masks his Jewishness during the Third Reich by playing the role of a Nazi.⁴ *Europa, Europa* is an uncomfortable film because its sexual hilarity and Brechtian irreverence chip away at the representation of the Holocaust as a narrative to be structured along classic direct-sequence lines, or as an event to be understood as a totality of good versus evil. Moreover, the film promotes a type of fetishism normally unbefitting to the Holocaust film genre: a fetishism that eroticizes the heroic male lead's Jewish body and focuses on his circumcized penis. Not too surprisingly, this kind of visual pleasure disrupted postwar/postwall Germany's unique

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Rückblick auf Chaplin' *Die Literarische Welt*, 8 February 1929. Translations mine unless otherwise noted.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* trans R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 115.

³ *Europa, Europa* (Agnieszka Holland, CCC Filmkunst/Margaret Menegoz/Les Films du Losange 1990).

⁴ Sally Perel, *Ich war Hitlerjunge Salomon*, trans Brigitta Restorff (Berlin: Nicolai, 1992), from the French translation of the original Hebrew. Perel also told of his experiences in one of the more than fourteen hundred video testimonies of Holocaust survivors at the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University.

- 5 *Der Spiegel* quotes Manfred Steinkühler of the Film-Ausführungsgemeinschaft Export-Union as speculating that the nomination committee had not judged Holland's film sufficiently 'German' - despite the film's *Ursprungszeugnis* (proof of its Germanness) from the Bundesamt für Wirtschaft 'Stur und streng *Der Spiegel* 30 December 1991, p. 149
- 6 The co-scriptwriter Paul Hengge dropped out complaining that its depiction of only good Jews and bad Germans amounted to an antiseptic simplistic 'reversal of racism' that could have an antisemitic 'boomerang effect' *Der Salomon als Bumerang?*, *Berliner Zeitung*, 12 February 1992. See also the producer's response to Hengge Artur Brauner, 'Die Entstehung eines Films *Die Welt*, 11 February 1992
- 7 Not that this kind of thing is unprecedented the German representation/reception trajectory of *Europa Europa* parallels that of Michael Verhoeven's film *Das schreckliche Mädchen/The Nasty Girl* (1990). This shared with Holland's film an emphasis on parodic Brechtian alienation effects in depicting the Nazi past an undeniable authenticity factor in the figure and texts of its outspoken real-life heroine Anja Rosmus of Passau a controversial reception in Germany and a popular welcome in the USA, with nominations for both the Golden Globe and the Oscars
- 8 Brauner had tried in vain throughout the 1980s to get financial backing from the Berlin Filmförderungsanstalt to film the Schindler story the FFA did in fact give him money for the making of Holland's film 'Von grossen Morden', *Der Spiegel* 21 February 1994, p. 174
- 9 For a discussion of the cultural miscegenation perceived to be in this film see Susan E. Linville, *Europa Europa a test case for German national cinema*, *Wide Angle*, vol. 16 no. 3 (1995) pp. 40-42

metafilmic discourse of nationhood and race. The film's backgrounding of the Shoah within a foregrounded comedy of male teenage sexual awakening and exploration was offensive to German critics. It is in this way that the politically incorrect *Europa, Europa* was found predominantly guilty by the German film establishment of crimes of Holocaust (mis)representation. Nonetheless, it is precisely this break with the norms of Holocaust filmic telling that makes *Europa, Europa* a crucial film, one that is indicative of a possible epistemic shift within our shared film-viewing imaginary of the Third Reich and its Others. The basic credo of Holland's film is to demonstrate and ridicule Nazi racist anxiety over the racial or sexual 'castration' of the Aryan in face of Jewish difference. The homoerotic absurdity underlying Nazi racism is reflected onto Solly's Jewish body, marked as it is by circumcision as the locus of this 'castration'. As a result of this confusion, both Jewish and German identities are brought into question.

Europa, Europa's reception in Germany has been both troubled and politicized. In the fall of 1991, Holland's film (a German-French coproduction with a mostly Polish crew, yet with financial backing from the Berlin *Filmförderungsanstalt*, and with German as its predominant language) was officially barred from consideration for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category because it was not, despite its German national 'certificate of origin', deemed German enough for the Commission of German Film Functionaries.⁵ In its stead, the commission could (or would) find no other film to nominate. One of the film's scriptwriters even had his name removed from the credits,⁶ and it remained poorly distributed in German cinemas. In the USA, however, the film found a surer footing as one of the most successful German films ever (after *Das Boot* [Wolfgang Petersen, 1981] and *The Tin Drum* [Volker Schlöndorff, 1979]), with first-run profits of more than four million dollars. Holland also received an open letter from Schlöndorff, Margarethe von Trotta, Michael Verhoeven, Wolfgang Petersen, Werner Herzog and Hanna Schygulla, urging US support for the film. On 18 January 1992, *Europa, Europa* was belatedly awarded a Golden Globe in Los Angeles, after being named best foreign film of the year by the US National Board of Review, and in February it received an Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay.⁷

That a film about Germany's outsiders under Nazism, directed by a Polish half-Jew and produced by a German Jew (Artur [Atze] Brauner),⁸ should suffer this kind of reception in a recently unified Germany⁹ is of course resoundingly ironic – something which Holland, Brauner and US film reviewers were quick to point out. The same German film establishment proceeded to welcome ecstatically the far more straightforward *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) as the 'work of mourning' (*Trauerarbeit*) that they were unable – or unwilling – to produce themselves. Clearly it was

10 cf. Claude Lanzmann's attack on Spielberg in 'Holocauste, la représentation impossible', translated as 'Ihr sollt nicht weinen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 March 1994

11 'Stur und streng', p. 149

12 Contrast Holland's pragmatically parodic practice of the Nazi salute to the variations of the same idea in Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's obsessively parodic film, *Hitler, Ein Film aus Deutschland*, which contains, for example, a retake on Charlie Chaplin's runaway Nazi salute in his film *The Great Dictator* (1940)

13 Perel stated that he had Voltaire's text in mind when writing his autobiography. Cited by Susan E. Linville. Agnieszka Holland's *Europa, Europa*: deconstructive humor in a Holocaust film, *Film Criticism*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1995) p. 47

14 See, for example H.G. Pfäum, 'Keine Zeit für Trauer', Agnieszka Holland's zum Politikum gewordener Film *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8 February 1992; Andreas Kilb, 'Ohne Oscar Kein Skandal der Kino-Streit um *Hitlerjunge Salomon*', *Die Zeit*, 31 January 1992; Rolf-Ruediger Hamacher, 'Hitlerjunge Salomon film-dienst', vol. 45, no. 3 (1992) p. 20. For a critique of these reviews see *Der Spiegel's* 'Stur und streng'

15 Claudius Seidl, 'Blamage mit Folgen', *Der Spiegel*, 27 January 1992, p. 177. This innate preference for the non-parodic/placardistic may account for Gertrud Koch's uneasily mixed review of the debacle concerning Holland's film 'Deutschland in Europa Überlegungen zu Agnieszka Holland's film *Hitlerjunge Salomon*', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 30 January 1992.

16 Wolfram Schütte 'Spiegel-verkehrt', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 January 1992

morally less ambiguous to depict the Shoah in Steven Spielberg's terms – or even in Claude Lanzmann's terms¹⁰ – than in Holland's. It is this dichotomy between the German reception of *Europa, Europa* and *Schindler's List* that makes the case of the rejected Holland film all the more intriguing. While *Der Spiegel* suggested that Germans simply did not want outsiders (that is, Jews) to interfere with their 'overcoming of the past',¹¹ *Schindler's List's* subsequent success in Germany evidently provided precisely that. This would suggest that the bulk of the German argument against Holland's film resided within its means of representation. Clearly, to represent Jews as noble victims with a steadfast sense of their own identity is an easier and more obvious device than to ridicule Nazism from within, using the figure of a Jew who must endure serial identities in order to escape victimhood. In short, to turn practicing a *Sieg Heil* salute in front of the mirror into a vaudeville dance routine is unimaginable in Spielberg's context, but makes perfect sense when Solly does so in Holland's.¹²

Following the judgement of the Commission, most German film reviewers found fault with Holland's departure from Salomon Perel's autobiography in favour of more Hollywood-like effects, such as the element of kitsch (even though the aged Perel himself approved the script and was present during production). In addition, the same critics were also troubled by Solly's utterly pragmatic and hence non-victim-like opportunism; by the film's lack of explicit mourning (indeed, German critics repeatedly *wanted* Solly to show schizophrenic scarring, *wanted* the film to be a tragedy); by its *Candide*-like¹³ episodic structure of events and unbelievable twists of fate; and, above all, by the amount of eroticism focused on the protagonist.¹⁴ For official German sensibilities all these factors constitute unforgivable wrongdoings in a Holocaust film. As the editor of *Der Spiegel* stated, *Europa, Europa* breaks the 'German taboo', namely the 'philosemitism of good Germans, who have a clean conscience and a correct consciousness and an image of an honest Jew in their heads'.¹⁵ It might be argued, however, that one obvious source of the official German resistance to the film may have had less to do with German antisemitism, or even philosemitism, than with the way in which the film caricatures most Germans as Nazi buffoons;¹⁶ one thinks here of the effeminate *Wehrmacht* soldier constantly polishing his boots; of the Nazi governess crying out 'Mein Führer' as she reaches climax in her nighttime seduction of Solly on the train; of the schoolteacher Goethke's strongly homoeroticized adulation of his (mostly!) Aryan pupils during the Jewish physiognomy lesson; or of the chief of police's crazed face as he tells Solly that Hitler's most recent military defeat was in fact part of the Nazis' strategic secret plan.

Europa, Europa simply fails to toe the line of what may be termed the unspoken (but practically universally accepted) 'reality

17 Ilan Avisar *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1988) pp 181–2

18 The need to present authenticated filmic memory of the Holocaust can be seen by the two most extreme positions taken up on the representational spectrum of the Holocaust 'reality principle', namely the montaged interviews of Lanzmann's *Shoah* and the Aristotelian film-drama *Schindler's List*. *Europa, Europa* seeks to both be present on this spectrum of authentication as well as go beyond it

19 cf. Andreas Kilb, 'Warten, bis Spielberg kommt', *Die Zeit* 28 January 1994 p 1

20 Solly's pubescent identity crisis is in this respect an emblem of how Nazism affected all of German society: parental influence was demoted in favour of a total allegiance by the young to Hitler. cf. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's study of adolescence during and after Nazism *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, 1967) pp 225–62

21 Milan Kundera, 'L'infamie immorale d'Agnieszka Holland cinéaste de l'impossible', *Le nouvel Observateur* no 1358 (15–21 November 1991) p 68

22 Susan E. Linville, 'Agnieszka Holland's *Europa, Europa*', pp 44–53

principle' of Holocaust narration on screen. Ilan Avisar's dictum is symptomatic thereof. 'Holocaust art . . . is generally impelled to contain a crucial layer of truthful referentiality. . . Holocaust film needs to retain a special relationship, aided by the unmatched recording power and transmitting effect of the photographic image, to historical reality.'¹⁷ According to this reality principle of filmic Shoah representations, *Europa, Europa* should have included a more explicit element of documentary and/or moral guidance for impressionable viewers (let alone those who need to be convinced that it ever happened).¹⁸ This apparent lack of 'truth referentiality' is precisely why *Europa, Europa* remained unpalatable to German critics, and suggests why it was not to be recognized as an 'overcoming of the past' (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), an honour that was definitively bestowed on *Schindler's List* instead.¹⁹

Yet the storyline of Holland's film is both incredible and true. The teenager Solly Perel finds that in order to survive he must renege all his prior identities relating to both locale and culture – first his German home-town of Peine, then his family left in Poland, and even his Jewish faith when he doubles as an atheist Young Pioneer in a Soviet orphanage. Ultimately, Solly forgoes his Jewish ethnicity in a serial redoubling among different groups of Nazis. Renamed Josef Peters or 'Jupp', he performs first as an adoptive *Volksdeutscher* from Poland, then as a homoerotic mascot for the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front, and finally as an adoptive, prototypical Hitler Youth back home in the Reich. All this happens to Solly between the ages of thirteen and twenty, just at the stage when an adolescent would normally break away from parental identification and form her or his own social roles; in Solly's case, this natural process is perverted by the Holocaust to a potentially schizophrenic regime of different survival strategies.²⁰ The film is also marked by events of uncanny chance that save Solly's life and which indicate that the protagonist's fate is destined to be different from that of his fellow Jews; he even shares his birthday, 20 April, with Hitler.

Despite its claim to authenticity as an autobiographical tale, with the real-life Salomon Perel appearing at the film's end as an implied guarantor of all we have seen (a gesture repeated at the end of *Schindler's List*), *Europa, Europa* is guilty of destabilizing the hallowed edifice of present-day Holocaust representational realities. Milan Kundera comments how Holland's intrepid obsession with capturing the 'impossible morality' of the Holocaust 'goes against the spirit of our time', which instead tends to be a 'simplistic moralism devoid of the least curiosity to understand the psychological mechanisms which set the horror alight'.²¹ To bring so insistently to Holocaust thematics (as this film does) surreal fantasy, spectacle, role-play, interchangeability, displacement, quotation, contradiction, 'deconstructive humour' (as Susan E. Linville has termed it)²² and,

above all, confused identities on racial–sexual–political levels was a shift the German critics could not feel comfortable with. There were precedents for this: once upon a time in the USA, Ernst Lubitsch's film *To Be or Not To Be* (1943) was likewise considered a 'disrespectful fantasy' by an indignant audience.²³

Gertrud Koch, however, in her study of the cinematic representation of Jews, *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung*, specifically argues against assuming film's purportedly close, realistic, mimetic relationship to history, especially in terms of its ability to represent the immeasurability of the Holocaust. She resists the tempting potential of film to provide a supposedly complete 'lexicon' that could satisfactorily cover the historical event of mass destruction as well as provide a hermeneutic 'system of description' for this event.²⁴ For Koch, even Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) is less a documentary than a work of camera-'subjective' focus.²⁵ Beyond filmic mimesis lies filmic imagination which for Koch refuses to operate 'according to the Wagnerian motif that only the sword that cut open the wound can heal it again'.²⁶ In the case of *Europa, Europa*, one does not necessarily have to go so far as to enter the *formal* arena of montage or other such avant-garde motifs in order to partake of Brechtian alienation effects suited to a mass audience. Even if not formally categorized as such, *Europa, Europa* is definitely Brechtian in so far as its reception evidently produced 'interventive thinking' (*eingreifendes Denken* – that is, the intervention Brecht wanted art to make among its audiences).²⁷ Instead the film offers a welcome multicultural exposure of the racist illusionism driving the very real atrocities of Nazism.²⁸

Europa, Europa's bold rewriting of Holocaust film history is expressed most clearly by its dialectical and overtly sexual engagement with the Jewish male body. Holland's film skilfully shows how Solly's difference as a male Jew is both life-threateningly real, as well as of no consequence whatever in the greater scheme of things. A multicultural European reality of mixed borders and confused nationalities is shown to be the only meaningful truth in a racial chaos of war and carnage:²⁹ for example, after Robert has been shot by the Russians, Solly grieves for his gay Nazi friend, 'the [sexually] other German', and the camera pulls straight up into an aerial, map-like view of them and the battlefield, set to a musical score of strident chords. From this bird's-eye perspective the life-and-death differences of a racial war appear belittled, and the essential transnational unity of the European ground is highlighted. Solly's voiceover at this moment of camera elevation is a cry for all those loved ones he has lost.³⁰ The attention of most of the film, however, is oriented less at the macrocosm of Europe than at the microcosmic level of Solly's missing *Stückchen Vor*: in other words, at the very item that Nazi antisemitism was obsessed with.

The key question to be asked about Holland's film in its

23 cf Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp 63–73, also Paul Virilio *War and Cinema: the Logistics of Perception*, trans Patrick Camiller (New York: Verso 1989) p 63

24 Gertrud Koch, *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung: Visuelle Konstruktionen des Judentums* (Frankfurt a M: Suhrkamp 1992), p 125

25 *Ibid.*, p 152

26 *Ibid.* p 14

27 Bertolt Brecht, 'Entwurf zu einer Zeitschrift "Kritische Blätter"', *Gesammelte Werke in 20 Bänden*, Volume 18 (Frankfurt a M: Suhrkamp, 1967), p 87

28 As Susan Bernofsky states 'By thematizing the problems that result from the unsettling ambiguities of the central character's situation and conduct the film presents a far more complex and thus also truer view of the Holocaust than is generally encountered' *Restaging the past: Hitlerjunge Salomon and its reception in Germany*, *faultline*, no 1 (1992), p 13

29 As Holland has asked 'Does our fate depend on us, on our choice of actions or are we playthings of history swept along in an absurd existence? Where is that fragile line between different cultures, different religions, different national or personal identities?' Cited in Judy Stone 'True tale of Jew "adopted" by Nazi soldiers in *Europa*', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 July 1991

30 'And so I lost my only friend the other German. He went out of my life like Kathy, the hunchback Basia, Inna, Moysheyma, Father, Mother, Bertha and Isaac. I want to be myself again. I want to go back to my own people.'

31 Koch, 'Deutschland in Europa', in *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung*

32 Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans Celia Britton, Aramyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1982), p 72

33 Laura Mulvey 'Some thoughts on theories of fetishism in the context of contemporary culture' *October*, no 65 (1993) p 20

unavoidable focus on Jewish male circumcision is whether it is merely 'acting out' its racist fetishistic structuration, or whether any 'working through' is ever attained. How, indeed, can a film succeed in this quest if it openly indulges in what Koch has termed a 'mythic structure'³¹ of Judaecide representation? A veritable plethora of erogenous viewing zones focused on Solly is offered up to the audience. And here is the snag in Holland's tale: the fetishism of the filmic gaze works here in 'gender'-reverse, or in 'ethnic'-substitution. Instead of the male-oriented 'visual pleasure' at the sight of the female screen body in narrative cinema, Holland's camera orchestrates a transgressive gaze upon the desirable body of the adolescent Jewish hero and narrator. We do indeed experience visual pleasure at the sight of Solly/Jupp appearing as the delimited subject and object of desire in practically every frame; but for the censorially sensitive this visual pleasure is rejected as a guilty feeling ill befitting the Shoah-referent. Is this sexual guilt a nervous over-correction of *Europa, Europa* as first and foremost a Holocaust film? According to Christian Metz's theory of filmic fetishism, the spectator, while not succumbing entirely to the illusion of film, nonetheless undergoes disavowal by maintaining a 'credulous person . . . seated beneath the incredulous one'.³² In such a circumstance, and in relation to the Holocaust film, can fetishism ever be transformed into an apparatus of cinematic viewing that promotes in Metzian (or Brechtian) terms the harder position of incredulity (distanciation) as well as the easier pleasure of credulity (identification)? We should ask ourselves if, and how, a critical understanding of the Holocaust can be served by the film's fetishized gaze onto the body of a young Jewish male and, specifically, onto his circumcized penis.

I would maintain that Holland, via fetishism, is indirectly structuring in her film a sense of Jewish spectatorship/feminist visual pleasure/homoerotic or homosocial gaze that may be considered liberating in a general sense. Given the predominant use of fetishism in recent film theory, one might not expect to extend this interpretive device into Holocaust studies. Yet for such marginalized viewing groups, any theories concerning a new spectatorship that this film may have to offer must derive from the film's highly contextualized, ethically engaged historical event. The fetishism of ethnic male sexuality in *Europa, Europa* is not a freely floating image, but rather a fully engaged dialogue between representation, race and society. In a 1993 article, Laura Mulvey herself calls for an end to the semiotic-aesthetic 'disavowal' of culture, and for a reconsideration of fetishism's roots in the production processes (or *causes*) behind the social imaginary (*effects*):³³ in this article she calls for an investigative relocation of the fetishistic structures in film back to the society whence they came. In short, she is asking for a healthy dose of Marxist (and, by analogy, Brechtian) historical materialism to be

mixed with the Freud-and-Lacan saturation of the last two decades of feminist film theory concerning fetishism. In a similar vein to Mulvey's new turn, Kaja Silverman includes also calls for sexual-psychoanalytic film theory to become engaged with the broader social agendas which influence the medium of film. She writes, 'we can no longer afford to isolate political theory and practice from the issues raised by the constitution of the ego and the formation of the unconscious, nor to imagine that subjectivity sustains no inevitable relation to violence . . . we need to begin thinking seriously about the political implications of desire and identification.'³⁴

Taking such suggestions as a cue, the spectacle of the Jew in modern antisemitism informs our understanding of *Europa, Europa* to the extent that it may be seen as running parallel to Marx's recognition of the false consciousness inherent in commodity fetishism, in which consumer products on display are relentlessly endowed with an eroticized image.³⁵ The Jew, and most particularly the Jewish male, in modern European society was consistently fetishized at the level of the body far beyond any actual biological materiality.³⁶ Unlike Homi Bhabha's differentiation of colonial fetishism from sexual fetishism as a non 'secret' – since the strong signifier of skin colour remains 'the most visible of fetishes'³⁷ – antisemitism was predicated on a series of fake differences that made the invisible and non-existent visible and existent. And yet, as Sander L. Gilman states in *The Case of Sigmund Freud*, the Jew living among antisemites was not only aware of himself as stereotype, as different in the fetishizing eyes of the antisemite, as the 'object that inspired the anxiety of his Other',³⁸ the Jew was also always aware that his body was – due to such ritual practices as 'infant male circumcision, ritual bathing, endogamous marriage' – in fact biologically different to that of the Christian European male. As such, the Jew could not deny his difference, for this 'racial identity' is, according to Gilman in *Freud, Race, and Gender*, 'indelibly marked on his genitalia'.³⁹

In this discourse of modern biological antisemitism and the Jew's own self-inculpation within it, it was not, however, the act or condition of being circumcized that damaged the Jew, but the antisemitic conditions of being among non-circumcized (Nazi) men. The male Nazi who redirected his castration anxiety from the personal to the collective level thereby 'Jewified' even the assimilated Jew. This is a crucial point in understanding the fetishistic viewing structure of Holland's film; it reveals that antisemitism is a sexually fetishistic, specular, substitutive structure in that it produces and confirms the non-Jewish subject's stable, pure-race identity as a positive reflection of the negative image constructed of the object-Jew as castrated (again this can be seen as a strategy to ward off castration for one's own racial self).

³⁴ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 296

³⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1936), p. 83

³⁶ In *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 46, Plate 9, Sander L. Gilman cites the Nazi caricaturist Walter Hoffman ('Waldi'), whose diagrammatic representation of the creation of the (male) Jew indicates that the Jew's body is a deformed incomplete specimen due to the archetypal Jew having walked before the 'clay' was dry. That the Jew was diseased was a given in antisemitic scientific parlance of the nineteenth century, as Gilman states, even circumcision itself (in the form of the *metsitsah*) was fantasized about as a probable source of syphilitic infection – from the mouth of the *mohel* to the penis of the infant. *Freud, Race and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 66–7

³⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 78

³⁸ Sander L. Gilman, *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin de Siècle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 4

³⁹ See also Gilman's comparison of the circumcision topic in *Europa Europa* with Esther Dischereit's novel, *Joemis Table* (1988). 'What Holland reflects, Dischereit internalizes' Gilman, 'Male sexuality and contemporary Jewish literature in German: the damaged body as the image of the damaged soul', *Genders*, no. 16 (1993), p. 121

Appropriately, Hitler's notorious description in *Mein Kampf* of the German State being vampirically raped by the bloodpoisoning parasite-Jew is a clear literalization of this already well-established imaging mechanism within modern German consciousness. Influenced by the Austrian Georg von Schoenerer's pan-Germanism,⁴⁰ Hitler produced a vivid phantasmagoria of the Jew as a sexualized Nosferatu, a parasite set on spoiling the pure race.

His spreading is a typical phenomenon for all parasites; he always seeks a new feeding ground for his race. He is and remains the typical parasite, a sponger who like a noxious bacillus keeps spreading as soon as a favourable medium invites him. . . . With satanic joy in his face, the black-haired Jewish youth lurks in wait for the unsuspecting girl whom he defiles with his blood, thus stealing her from her people. . . . The end is not only the end of the freedom of the peoples oppressed by the Jew, but also the end of this parasite upon the nations. After the death of his victim, the vampire sooner or later dies too.⁴¹

The stereotypical parasite-Jew was thus perceived to be an inseminating, *male* threat,⁴² one that would endanger the Nazi cult of the Overman and his Teutonic progeny. Similarly, when the psychologist Otto Rank, in his turn-of-the-century essay 'The essence of Judaism' ('Das Wesen des Judentums'), purported that the 'psychic-parasitic existence of the Jews has its biological analogy in the parasites, of which the sexual component makes up the most considerable part of the body,'⁴³ he was most definitely envisaging a *phallic* parasite.

In the case of Nazism, then, antisemitic structures are thus conceived of in almost wholly male terms – a Jewish invasion into the virginal body of the *Volk*. From this perspective, Holland's film both pinpoints and belies the collective Nazi fantasy concerning the male Jew: the unique alienation effect housed by Solly's body shows up the absurdity of a hypostatically fixed or genetically predetermined semitic identity. The viewer is continually reminded of Solly's circumcision as an innocently religious/cultural difference that has been demonized, or metastasized, beyond his control. The proof of his Jewishness that he must hide in his pants (along with his passport) remains *de facto* resistant to the Nazi *mythos*.

Imperial, Weimar and Nazi Germany's increasing dependence on the alterity of the Jew for its own sense of national identity (a belated nation composed in contrast to its alien, Jewish, 'inner' nation) can be likened to the masculine subject's perennial dependency on the female as Other. The Nazis were consistent in their racial version of Freudian castration anxiety⁴⁴ – their Aryan belief in the 'female penis'⁴⁵ encoded by the Jewish threat. Nazi or foreskin fetishism regarding Jewish difference is thus a racial extension of a predominantly sexual anxiety over women. In

40 Hannah Arendt *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1973) pp 238–43

41 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1971) pp 305–325, 327

42 Jewish women were included in this antisemitic vision in so far as they could, through their fertility give literal new life to the Jewish male threat. Given the gender emphasis of the Nazis, historical studies on German antisemitism have tended understandably, to focus on the plight of male Jews. For a correction of this imbalance, see Marion A. Kaplan's essay, 'Tradition and transition: the acculturation, assimilation and integration of Jews in Imperial Germany, a gender analysis' *Leo Baeck Yearbook*, no. 27 (1982), pp 3–35. See also Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (eds) *Judaism Since Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997), and Aviva Cantor, *Jewish Women, Jewish Men: The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995).

43 Cited by Dennis B. Klein *Jewish Origins of the Psychoanalytical Movement* (New York: Praeger Publishers 1981), p 171

44 See Freud *Gesammelte Werke*, Volume 14 (London: Imago 1940–1952), p 313. Gilman even suggests that Freud's reading of fetishism is located within Freud's own personal experience of *metzitsah*-circumcision as one of pain, difference and loss projected onto the mother's genitalia. See Gilman, *Freud Race, and Gender*, p 72.

45 Mulvey 'Some thoughts on theories of fetishism', p 11

⁴⁶ cf. Judith Butler, who draws on Lacan's 'The meaning of the phallus' and Luce Irigaray's elaboration of the female masquerade of 'being' the Phallus, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 44–7.

⁴⁷ Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a masquerade' (1929), in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

Lacanian terms, the Jew (like woman) 'is' or 'signifies' the Phallus for the benefit of the hegemonic Nazi world. He must relinquish 'having' the Phallus of identity and self-empowerment, just as women give up their own desire in the patriarchal field of representation.⁴⁶ Thus it makes perfect ideological and representational sense for a male Jew, hiding out in the open and undergoing multiple disguises and self-displacements in order to survive, to demonstrate the 'feminine' skills usually applied to him anyway: skills akin to those Joan Riviere first described in her interpretation of 'womanliness as a masquerade'.⁴⁷

Solly's life as Jupp among the Nazis is necessarily organized around a series of literal coverups of his Jewish penis, often relating to the potentially fatal exposure connected to water and bathing: with the *Wehrmacht* soldiers around he is unable even to urinate freely. Later he is relieved to discover that in the school's showers he can wear underpants and stand behind a locked door, while even the swimming contest that Solly wins is performed, symbolically enough, in Nazi uniform. Such is the threat of literal disclosure of his lost prepuce that the very first shot of the film is of an underwater dream battle between Solly in Hitler Youth uniform and an unknown assailant who appears to be attempting to 'defrock' him. In only two instances, both bathing scenes, is the adolescent Solly fully naked, and in both instances his life and ethnicity are immediately endangered by this exposure. Luckily for Solly, both moments of naked truth are 'covered up', first by a leather Gestapo overcoat that the little girl next door throws at him as he hides in the barrel after



Solly hiding in a barrel from the Nazis, *Europa, Europa*. Picture courtesy: Museum of Modern Art, New York.

the Nazis' attack on the family home in Peine, and later on by Robert's protection of Solly's deadly secret after the former's attempted sexual advance in the hay barn. In another sequence we see Solly stage a severe toothache in order to avoid a medical checkup by the school doctor. His fake howls of toothache are replaced by real howls of agony as a healthy tooth is removed, thereby providing the viewers with a parodic replay of the film's earlier scene of Solly's circumcision as a baby: both 'extractions' confirm the protagonist's Judaism, albeit the second through a form of negative substitution.

In this way, Solly is obliged to undertake the masquerade of 'being' the Phallus under the Nazi regime. The Nazi image of the Jew is a double-edged sword, castrated and castrating; precisely because the male Jew was seen as not 'having' a Phallus but 'being' it, he wields a feminine, inverted power out of the lack of foreskin.⁴⁸ Therefore, the film's *suggestion* of a homosexual relationship between Robert and Solly fits into the rubric of Solly adopting any identity that comes his way.⁴⁹ Circumcized *ergo* feminized, the Jew, according to Nazi doctrine, represents a dangerous, Aryan-assimilative, *Volk*-infecting lack, in need of subterfuge to mask his genital loss. One of the ironies in the film is that Solly must renounce his sexual desire for his girlfriend Leni in order to keep his lack of foreskin hidden; he must masquerade as being too virtuous to procreate for *Lebensborn* offspring. Because of her fanatic allegiance to the Nazi girls organization (*Bund deutscher Mädel*), Leni ends up taunting the very thing he must keep hidden (she calls him an 'impotent limp dick' [*impotenter Schlappschwanz*]), and goes off to seduce his roommate Gerd so that she may have an Aryan baby to give to Hitler, the idealized father-figure. Solly is thus forced to deny, sublimate and vilify his own circumcized masculinity in order to enact the very fantasy that the Nazis would have all Jews play: that of the 'enemy within'.

How, then, is the audience involved in *Europa, Europa*'s foreskin fetishism? The above ironies illustrate how Holland's film is a potential quagmire of mixed Holocaust messages. Our viewing desire for Solly's body becomes inextricably enmeshed within these Nazi sociocultural prejudices and Nazi sexual-racial blind spots. This precarious merger of our visual fetishistic pleasure *vis-à-vis* Solly with Nazi fantasy *vis-à-vis* the Jews undoubtedly constitutes the major risk of the film.⁵⁰ Undoubtedly, our erotic gaze onto Solly is mixed up in the feminization⁵¹ of his body (and his purported lack) that is simultaneously the mainstay of the Nazis' (ab)use of the Jew. Yet *fetishistic looking in film* involves the *spectated* as much as the *spectator*, and in this context, one of Solly's most marked and deliberate gestures is his habit of leaning back in moments of crisis, eyes closed or heavenward, tilting his head back and up in a submissive and seductive closeup pose: through this he invites the

⁴⁸ In *Freud, Race, and Gender*, Gilman suggests that Freud's public statements about women are a displacement of his private statements about Jews, and that his 'Dark Continent' metaphor for female sexuality was in fact an unconscious synonym for the antisemitic viewpoint of deeming Jews to be blacks; moreover, *der Jude* was *fin-de-siècle* Viennese slang for clitoris, suggesting that the public imagination considered both female genitalia and the Jewish circumcized penis to be effectively, castrated organs (pp 37–9).

⁴⁹ For an assessment of Solly's temporary homosexual identity see Jonathan Romney, 'Europa, Europa', *Sight and Sound* (May 1992), p. 49.

⁵⁰ Susan Bernofsky rightly focuses on the 'aesthetics of ambiguity' of *Europa, Europa* but she does not apply this yardstick to the more problematic sexual-emotional identificatory processes at work in this film via the body of Solly 'Restaging the past' p. 20.

⁵¹ See Steve Neale on the feminized body of the screen male as soon as he becomes the object of an erotic gaze 'Masculinity as spectacle' in John Caughie and Annette Kuhn (eds) *The Sexual Subject: a Screen Reader in Sexuality*, (New York: Routledge 1992) pp 277–87.

viewer to adopt an active, protective stance. Indeed, the film's moments of Solly's feminized trademark gesture indicate that within the film too he is a willing recipient and manipulator of his interlocutor's active gaze: be this his *Wehrmacht* cross-examiners; Goethke performing a phrenological test on his face and head and declaring him an East Baltic Aryan; Leni just after their first kiss in the woods; or Leni's mother when she tells Solly that Leni is pregnant by Gerd. This is not a tale of typical Holocaust voyeurism, for Solly is not playing a Jew-as-bject-victim role; rather, in this repeated, extra-diegetic gesture of spectacle he repeatedly invites a fetishistic gaze. He undoubtedly has more autonomy and subversive creativity with respect to his masquerade than other young Jewish male protagonists in more 'straightforwardly' represented Holocaust films (such as Peter Lilienthal's *David* [1979])⁵² The political ambiguity, however, is that Solly is engaging all and sundry in the same movement

Spectatorial involvement with Solly leads to our sharing in his predicament of over-engaging with the roles he is having to play. His confusion of identity is understandable given the ludicrous, yet very dangerous, schoolroom lesson of 'How do you recognize a Jew?', where the only obvious remaining marker of racial difference that is not explicitly mentioned by the teacher Goethke is the sexual one (this despite the undeniable homoerotics of the purportedly 'scientific' educational moment). In this scene, Solly is proclaimed a member of the Aryan race only on the basis of the elision of the penis – and temporarily even he believes it. His absorption within Nazi foreskin fetishism is so complete that he tries to re-create his foreskin; pulling down the skin and tying it with string until infection sets in and he is forced to admit to himself the limit of his own feminine plasticity. The narrator's autobiographical voiceover indicates this limit: 'I couldn't flee from my own body'. A dream-sequence follows soon after in which Solly's dead sister Bertha leads him from a Passover scene of his family into a closet where he can hide from the Nazis: Hitler is hiding in there too, covering his crotch with his hands in a gesture similar to Solly's when he was in pain from his efforts to fix his preputial lack. Bertha says of Hitler. 'He's a Jew too. That's why he always covers it with his hands.' Indeed, it seems that Nazism has far more to hide and to disguise than does Solly. In a further confusion of positionality, the figure of Hitler in the dream is transformed into that of the dead Robert, the (former) actor and closet gay, who died on the Eastern Front in Solly's arms. This dream-sequence constitutes, perhaps, Solly's most serious crisis of ethnic and sexual consciousness in the film (indeed the marker of his difference is what wakes him up, for he has wet the bed), and as a result of its images he decides to travel to Lodz in an attempt to regain contact with his parents in the ghetto. In this striking scene, as Solly travels repeatedly through the ghetto on the tram, we are

⁵² For a comparison of *Europa* with *David*, see Linville, 'A test case' pp 46–8

permitted to share only his furtive and incomplete glances into the streets. The iris-effect is established by Solly's own peep-hole on the tram's painted glass window: our voyeuristic location is as hygienically separated from Jewish existence as is Solly in his Nazi uniform.

After this ghetto visit, which serves as Solly's first real indication as to the fate of the Jews, the film cuts to a short but telling scene of the Hitler Youth schoolboys using bayonets on their rifles to charge and lunge at what may be assumed to be a target off-right. Only when it is Solly's turn to stab does the camera pan to the right to show us the dummy with its yellow star. The scene continues as the camera performs a reverse-angle shot to behind the dummy; we see Solly's shock of recognition, and then cut back again to a closeup of the yellow star as if from Solly's perspective. Unsurprisingly, he falters at encountering this version of his own ethnicity (the first such stars he had seen were on the Hieronymus Bosch-like Jews in the ghetto) and is ordered to charge and stab again. The camera then reverses angle again to establish a counter-shot from behind the dummy, so that the offscreen viewer is in the position of being attacked by Solly, the Nazified, self-annihilating Jew. A lethal incision is therefore the fitting punishment for the condition of circumcision and the possession of alien blood; as the schoolboys were singing when Solly first arrived at the school: 'Let the knives sink into the Jew's body [*Judenleib*]. Blood must flow, flow must blood.' The marching-song of Nazi incision has therefore symbolically supplanted the mother's song, the rabbi's chant and the baby's gurgling during Solly's circumcision in the first scene of the film.

Circularity is achieved and Jewish identity regained, however, when at the end of the film (and at the end of the war) Solly is captured by Soviet troops. Under the order of the soldiers, an ex-concentration camp internee is about to execute Solly. In one final, uncanny piece of luck, however, Solly's brother is present and recognizes him as a Jew; he calls out his real name just in time to save him.⁵³ This naming of Solly by his real name in Polish, Salek, saves him in more ways than one, for by this time, Solly – in the guise of a well-fed Nazi soldier – finds himself unable to 'prove' the fact of his Jewishness to the Soviet soldiers (which he could do by dropping his pants, just as an Armenian had attempted in a previous scene to prove the opposite to the Germans). Solly is too stunned or too ashamed to act after the Soviets push his face into a pile of photos documenting Nazi camp atrocities, the multiple images of starved Jewish corpses in the pictures, and the walking skeletons of camp survivors all around him (of which Solly's brother is one) signify much more clearly to the Soviets (and perhaps to Solly) what he *ought* to look like if he were indeed a Jew. This final crisis of the film suggests that Solly's chameleon-like talent for acting may have

⁵³ Holland uses considerable poetic licence in this scene. In reality Solly was caught by US soldiers who did not attempt to shoot him. See Perel *Ich war Hitlerjunge Salomon*, pp. 172–3

saved him from Auschwitz, but may also have lost him any fixed identity within the Jewish tradition. However, true to this film's fairy-tale fondness for drastic peripeteia, Solly's life and Jewishness are returned to him by this last act of fortuitous recognition. The brothers' shared open-air urination scene signifies a final, simple release for Solly from his foreskin masquerade. While for the real Perel the transition back to Judaism was neither so swift nor so neatly symbolic, Holland's film has no such qualms. Indeed, the closing shot of the film shows us Perel himself, now an old man in Israel, singing the same song as the Jewish mother from the film's beginning, indicating that a form of Jewish maternal identity has been regained. The lack of foreskin is therefore revealed to be what it has in fact been all along: no inferiority or threat, just a negativity on which a century of German medical science, and the National Socialist phantasmagoria concerning the Jew's body were based. The problematic mark of Solly's Jewish identity is even maintained for the next generation: the voiceover narrator informs the audience that Solly had hesitated only very briefly before having his *own* sons circumcized.

Holland thus engages her audience in a thematic, *metaphorical* version of Eisenstein's formalist montage-dialectics. Instead of a *metonymical* conflict-in-motion, whereby one shot serves as thesis for the following antithetical counter-shot, *Europa, Europa* offers a repeated antithesis on the level of conflated racial and ideological identities: in one vision-scene, Hitler dances with Stalin, a dead antisemitic Polish boy from the Soviet orphanage signifies the martyred Christ, and gunfire replaces Communist candies falling from heaven. The original title for the film in Germany, *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, is itself a parody of the famous Nazi propaganda film of 1933, *Hitlerjunge Quex* (Karl Ritter). As Eric Rentschler states: '*Hitler Youth Quex* fulfilled essential aspirations of Nazi fantasy production . . . [Nazi] film was enlisted to simplify the world rather than to complicate it – in essence, to dedialecticize reality.'⁵⁴ By the use of this word-play in the title, Holland's film rescripts and undermines Nazi identity formation. Solly has not only changed identity more quickly and more frequently than Heini (the 'quicksilver' convert to the blessings of Nazism from the evils of Communism); Holland's Hitler Youth has another distinct advantage over Ritter's – he knows only too well the falsity of the German insider fantasizing about the non-German outsider, since this 'Other' can be mistaken so easily for the 'I', and vice versa.

This, then, is the helpful lesson that Holland's film has to offer. Finally, we have been given a Jewish protagonist who takes charge of his fetishized representation, who shows subversive autonomy over his masquerade. *Europa, Europa* provides a useful externalization, by means of the foreskin, of what the Nazi doctrine internalized, by means of blood, and challenges the fixed boundaries of difference.

⁵⁴ Eric Rentschler *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1996), p. 68.

under racism. It provides a parodic enunciation of the resisting pluralities and confused crossfire of the deadly *Kulturkämpfe* waged in World War II. The 'dedialecticizing' of reality in *Hutlerjunge Quex* has been provocatively *redialecticized* by Holland in her insistent emphasis on the human body as the contradictory carrier – and thus interrupter – of any ideological purity. *Europa, Europa*'s use of foreskin fetishism may be said, then, to have 'worked through' the taboo possibility of a combined Jewish-Nazi identity, and – albeit by taking considerable representational risks – to have led the audience into new possibilities of distanciation and identification in the process of understanding the sexual and racial implications of the Holocaust.

special debate

Flowers and tears: the death of Diana, Princess of Wales

Preface

While everyone responded in their own particular ways to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, few appear to have been either lost for words or hesitant in framing suitable gestures and actions. Savouring the unaccustomed *frisson* of being caught up in, rather than detached from, the public mood, scholars and intellectuals have been no exception. In the week or two following the death, countless thinkpieces by prominent columnists appeared in Britain's quality press, each bearing aloft her (for the majority of these pieces were by women writers) particular truth about the event and people's (including her own) responses to it. A surprising number of these interpretations implicitly or explicitly conveyed a sense of insufficiency – a feeling, as with Barthes's famous third meaning, that there might well be something beyond explanation about it all. How difficult it is for the cultural critic or the semiotician to acknowledge that some signs might have no meaning, that some meanings might be simply too profound to yield themselves up to the familiar rituals of deconstruction; how thrilling nonetheless to pursue elusive meaning into the underbrush of myth; how gratifying, too, to feel that one's craft might at last be of some use in the wide world.

Diana's death exposed many truths about our commitments and priorities, collective as well as personal; and *Screen's* intervention in the debate surrounding it is probably an act of mourning in the classic sense – one of the 'suitable' gestures and actions referred to above – as much as it is an occasion for the exchange of ideas (though on this subject many of the journal's readers will surely be

interested in *Screen's* particular brand of analysis)

The five essays which follow were commissioned during the week between Diana's death and the funeral. Although a new academic year was about to begin, and despite a very tight schedule, contributors were remarkably keen to offer their responses – though once again the preponderance of women among them is worthy of note, suggesting as it does a gender disparity if not in interest in the issue then certainly in willingness to offer public comment about it.

Many commentators on the event of the death and the responses to it, especially those schooled in academic styles of communication, have found their accustomed modes of writing wanting. While in their different ways, all of the contributors to this dossier have drawn on their experience and expertise as cultural analysts, all are aware of the challenge involved in applying these skills to a phenomenon of such extraordinary cultural weight. If the feelings produced by this activity expose the limitations of accustomed styles of communication, writers might – as one or two have done here – be inspired to press at the boundaries of scholarly writing.

The contributions to this dossier address a range of aspects of the Diana phenomenon: the Diana icon and its transformations over the years; the narrative forms which have constructed popular understandings of her life and death; the mediations of television coverage of the death and its aftermath; the complex and oftentimes contradictory constructions of nationhood negotiated in this moment; the continuities and tensions between personal, domestic, media and public space thrown up in the period around the funeral. The dossier makes no pretence to exhaust all the issues, however. There are key aspects of this global media and cultural event which are barely touched upon here; and we therefore propose to extend the debate

with further contributions and responses, which we welcome from our readers.

Annette Kuhn

Icon

'Ineffable' was almost the only epithet not applied to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. It was an occasion when nobody, neither media commentators nor members of the public, confessed to being lost for words. The event produced an excess of analogy, expressing by simile and metaphor what the Princess was like, what she meant personally, what she represented nationally and globally. In the process, the notion of Diana as 'icon' embodying multiple and often contradictory meanings became central to public discourse. In this essay I want to trace the emergence of some central themes through the 1980s and 1990s by considering how feminist cultural commentators organized their discussions of the representation of Diana around the notion of 'icon'.

Published in 1984, Diana Simmonds's *Princess Di: The National Dish – The Making of a Media Star* was the earliest book-length discussion. It covered the period from September 1980, when the media first 'discovered' and started following Diana, her engagement and wedding in 1981, and the global stardom confirmed in 1983 by a triumphal Australian tour with the baby Prince William when her celebrity began to eclipse Charles. Although the book's cover design connects Diana with Heinz baked beans, Simmonds ignores the consumerist implications of her own title conceit to concentrate on Diana's exemplification of both traditional and modern femininity: she is Virgin Mother and Fairy Princess, but also 'the modern heroine of the eighties'.

Also published in 1984 (in her collection *Female Desire*), Rosalind Coward's essay 'The royals' covers the same period and is

the first to explore in depth the soap opera analogy which was to become common from the 1980s. 'The royals' produces Diana as 'modern', Coward argues, whilst simultaneously reducing all issues faced by modern women to 'choices within the family'. Soap opera thus not only represses questions of female independence, but also accomplishes a repression of political and economic factors by concentrating on the primacy of sexual alliances and the fascination of human emotions bound up with traditional values. But Coward also highlights the shifting characterization of Diana, which even as early as 1983 is acquiring the attributes of the wilful wife who is getting above herself and her long-suffering husband.

This theme is taken up by Joan Smith in *Misogynies* (1989): her essay 'The frog princess' deals with the years between 1985 and 1987, when rumours of marital problems first emerged. Smith replays the romantic heroine analogy of the engagement/wedding period with reference to Georgette Heyer's Regency novel, *Arabella*. The appeal of Diana–Arabella for both the Prince and a misogynist culture, Smith suggests, is one of arrested development: the figure of the child–woman. The problem arises with the sequel: for a fictional happy-ever-after must go no further than the wedding, allowing the heroine to remain dependent and inexperienced. Imprisoned in the 'tinsel fantasy' of the royal wedding, Diana cannot acquire the symbols of adult womanhood without being represented as wilful, unreasonable, spoiled and arrogant: hence 'a princess . . . who was kissed by Fleet St and turned into a frog'.

Joan Smith's account of the sequel, the essay, 'To Di for: the queen of broken hearts', was published in the week of Diana's death in *Different for Girls*. It charts a 1990s Diana who has, after all, broken free of the fairy-tale to take control of her own image, notably via the Andrew Morton biography of 1992, and the *Panorama* interview of 1995.

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But Smith sees the result as colluding with the media to produce yet more misogynistic myths of traditional femininity. *la donna abbandonata, la traviata* and Miss Havisham. As with these fictional figures, the 'break' cannot go beyond the wedding, marriage, or any sexual alliance – except in terms of repeated betrayal (by Charles, by James Hewitt . . .). Smith's emphasis on Diana's media manipulation of tragic victim status involves a polemic against a more prevalent feminist interpretation of the *Panorama* interview, for whose genesis she credits the then Guardian columnist Suzanne Moore. This claims Diana for mass female identification as an exemplar of strength and autonomy in the terms of the feminist/gay anthem: 'I will survive'.

After Diana's death, Suzanne Moore's interpretation predominated, and images of Diana as autonomous woman were amplified into those of a quasi-feminist survivor of both betraying men and a hostile royal family. These images were also aligned with features of popular and democratic culture in ways already anticipated by columnist Julie Burchill in her 1992 essay 'Di hard: the pop princess'. This compares Diana with the powerful, in-control 'stars', Madonna and Margaret Thatcher, but then asserts that 'beyond' them and the Windsors 'she is the point' (*Sex and Sensibility*). Anticipating the Prime Minister's spoken tribute and many of the subsequent written ones, she emphasizes: 'the love and loyalty of the people has shifted irretrievably from the ruling house – until death, beyond divorce and dishonour – to one individual. To the one and only People's – and Pop's Princess'.

For Burchill, Diana is 'the first royal icon raised on and sustained by pop culture'. This is signalled not only by her knowledge and enjoyment of soaps, romantic novels and advertising jingles, but also by the 'popness' of spontaneity and openness: 'Not for Diana the stiff upper lip and stiff G and T attitude to disappointments of the heart: she is as

touchy-feely psychologically as she is physically'. The 'performance' of pop attributes ('like all great stars, she is only truly alive when performing') is what makes Diana not only lovable and loved, but also perceived as of, rather than apart from, the people.

Burchill and the other women commentators see Diana as icon in the dual senses of defining images of femininity and 'signs of the times'. For Simmonds, who scorns a version of film studies for dissecting the 'star' icon while ignoring its social and political context, Diana's marriage to Charles stands as an antidote to the psychological and economic depressions of early Thatcherism, and evokes the glamorous fascination of the marriage of Elizabeth and Philip in Austerity Britain. Whilst the touchstone for all Joan Smith's essays is the cultural climate surrounding the Yorkshire Ripper murders of the late 1970s, which she sees as revealing the extent and depth of misogyny in British and western culture, her case studies are of women if not literally or metaphorically killed off then actually or figuratively reduced or undermined. Her 1997 essay collection asks why, when women in actuality are seizing power, *fin-de-siècle* anxiety about women's autonomy should cluster around obsessional fascination with three major 'sad icons'. 'Diana, Marilyn and Jackie. Each of them, in her own way, represents a type of femininity which is both out of date and extremely seductive – for women as well as men – at a moment when the old certainties about gender no longer seem to apply.'

In 1992 Camille Paglia examined Diana's iconic status in terms of the notion of cultural masks or 'personae'. Paglia transcends the traditional/modern, victim/survivor oppositions to present a thoroughly overdetermined icon, reprising and incorporating a range of classical and contemporary analogies: Cinderella, betrayed wife, princess in the tower, *mater dolorosa*, last of the silent movie stars, the beautiful boy. These are then

wrapped up in the dominant persona of the pagan goddess Diana–Artemis. Paglia takes the Artemis huntress–hunted allegory to highlight the sheer unsustainability of the Diana icon, which, she observes, has become so freighted with varied personae and mutually contradictory imagery that it risks consuming and cannibalizing the real person: ‘Mass media have made both myth and disaster out of Diana’s story. We have created her in our own image And pursued by our best wishes, Diana the huntress is now the hind paralysed in the world’s gunsight’ (*Vamps and Tramps*).

Paglia’s conclusion was echoed in Earl Spencer’s reference to the ‘irony’ of the Artemis story in his Westminster Abbey tribute at Diana’s funeral: ‘It is a point to remember that of all the ironies about Diana, perhaps the greatest was this, a girl given the name of the ancient goddess of hunting was, in the end, the most hunted person of the modern age’. In the immediate aftermath of Diana’s death many of the earlier iconic strands reemerged in the public messages placed outside the royal palaces and at focal points nationwide. Notably, there was the return of ‘the fairy-tale ending’ with Dodi Fayed, the last lover, replacing Charles in a popularly imagined everlasting unity of ‘Di and Dodi’

At the same time, the term ‘icon’ itself was unselfconsciously adopted in the vocabulary of everyday speech, and massively reinforced in the tributes to Diana. Developed as a secularized concept, the notion of ‘icon’ passed through art history and linguistics into semiotics and film studies, and from there into cultural commentary and journalism, emerging into popular idiom in written and spoken messages and slogans prompted by Diana’s death. But in this popular appropriation the term reassumed its earlier religious meaning, particularly through the emphasis on the caring and compassionate aspect of Diana’s persona – which had often been the subject of media ridicule and

cynicism during her lifetime. The mounting piles of memorials offered a kind of ecumenical apotheosis of Diana in a quite unironic manner, on the lines of, ‘Born a princess. Died a saint’, ‘A light has gone out’, ‘A new angel in heaven’, ‘Princess of love’, ‘Like Jesus’. Ritual reference was made to the heaped tributes being ‘shrines’ to Diana, while the routes between the shrines became those of ‘pilgrimage’

Rosalind Brunt

Story

Whatever else she was, Diana was incontrovertibly a story. Written immediately after her death, this essay is an attempt to look at the different narrative forms which built up around her in her lifetime and which have been available as people attempt to make sense of her death. I want to look also at how public responses to Diana’s death used – and rejected – these constructions in an ambivalent and complex way.

Of the many narrative forms available, four have been especially widely deployed in representations of Diana since she joined the Royal Family on her marriage to Prince Charles in 1981. The first is the fairy-tale. This is a story of origins, in which a Proppian lack is liquidated by the wedding. It provided a satisfactory linear history in which Diana’s unhappy childhood, her loss of her mother, her desire to fit in and be ‘a good wife’, could all be resolved in a magical transformation. In this story, Diana’s lack of educational qualifications and anything resembling career ambitions could stand for the more traditional humble origins of the woodcutter’s daughter, her innocence and virginity translated into rare qualities which fitted her perfectly for the part. Like all fairy-tales, this story ended with a wedding, with the kiss on the balcony, a kiss so brief in television’s moving image but frozen into a

wrapped up in the dominant persona of the pagan goddess Diana–Artemis. Paglia takes the Artemis huntress–hunted allegory to highlight the sheer unsustainability of the Diana icon, which, she observes, has become so freighted with varied personae and mutually contradictory imagery that it risks consuming and cannibalizing the real person: ‘Mass media have made both myth and disaster out of Diana’s story. We have created her in our own image And pursued by our best wishes, Diana the huntress is now the hind paralysed in the world’s gunsight’ (*Vamps and Tramps*).

Paglia’s conclusion was echoed in Earl Spencer’s reference to the ‘irony’ of the Artemis story in his Westminster Abbey tribute at Diana’s funeral: ‘It is a point to remember that of all the ironies about Diana, perhaps the greatest was this, a girl given the name of the ancient goddess of hunting was, in the end, the most hunted person of the modern age’. In the immediate aftermath of Diana’s death many of the earlier iconic strands reemerged in the public messages placed outside the royal palaces and at focal points nationwide. Notably, there was the return of ‘the fairy-tale ending’ with Dodi Fayed, the last lover, replacing Charles in a popularly imagined everlasting unity of ‘Di and Dodi’

At the same time, the term ‘icon’ itself was unselfconsciously adopted in the vocabulary of everyday speech, and massively reinforced in the tributes to Diana. Developed as a secularized concept, the notion of ‘icon’ passed through art history and linguistics into semiotics and film studies, and from there into cultural commentary and journalism, emerging into popular idiom in written and spoken messages and slogans prompted by Diana’s death. But in this popular appropriation the term reassumed its earlier religious meaning, particularly through the emphasis on the caring and compassionate aspect of Diana’s persona – which had often been the subject of media ridicule and

cynicism during her lifetime. The mounting piles of memorials offered a kind of ecumenical apotheosis of Diana in a quite unironic manner, on the lines of, ‘Born a princess. Died a saint’, ‘A light has gone out’, ‘A new angel in heaven’, ‘Princess of love’, ‘Like Jesus’. Ritual reference was made to the heaped tributes being ‘shrines’ to Diana, while the routes between the shrines became those of ‘pilgrimage’

Rosalind Brunt

Story

Whatever else she was, Diana was incontrovertibly a story. Written immediately after her death, this essay is an attempt to look at the different narrative forms which built up around her in her lifetime and which have been available as people attempt to make sense of her death. I want to look also at how public responses to Diana’s death used – and rejected – these constructions in an ambivalent and complex way.

Of the many narrative forms available, four have been especially widely deployed in representations of Diana since she joined the Royal Family on her marriage to Prince Charles in 1981. The first is the fairy-tale. This is a story of origins, in which a Proppian lack is liquidated by the wedding. It provided a satisfactory linear history in which Diana’s unhappy childhood, her loss of her mother, her desire to fit in and be ‘a good wife’, could all be resolved in a magical transformation. In this story, Diana’s lack of educational qualifications and anything resembling career ambitions could stand for the more traditional humble origins of the woodcutter’s daughter, her innocence and virginity translated into rare qualities which fitted her perfectly for the part. Like all fairy-tales, this story ended with a wedding, with the kiss on the balcony, a kiss so brief in television’s moving image but frozen into a

longer and more meaningful image: one which should have signified a happy ending but had to be translated into a beginning of another kind of story.

Classic narrative can be defined in terms of the disruption and restoration of a stable situation. In this story, though clearly the central protagonist, Diana was more ambiguously placed since she functioned as the disruptive agent. This story allowed for, indeed needed, its main character's less amenable qualities, for it offered different readings. On the one hand, Diana's disruptive qualities could be read as a breath of fresh air, a desire to bring the Royal Family up to date; on the other, they could be understood as neurotic, manipulative and selfish. The 1995 *Panorama* interview was a crucial narrative turning-point, a move in which the heroine tried to seize authorship of her own story, not only to become its narrator but also to explain how the story could make sense only if the disruptive quality of its heroine was reread as moral virtue. This was, of course, endlessly debated, but once again the narrative lacked closure, the resolution which classic narratives need because, as Barthes's proairetic code indicates, we make sense of them only retrospectively; we understand their beginnings through a knowledge of their endings.

The soap opera form, however, provided precisely the never-ending quality which tighter narrative forms like the fairy-tale and the classic narrative lacked. The wedding in the early 1980s coincided with a worldwide boost of the soap opera format led by the US primetime television stories *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, and in Britain by new realist soaps, particularly *EastEnders* and the revived *Coronation Street*. The soap opera format relied on conflict within, and affairs outside families; it also allowed for villainesses as well as heroines and established clear characters – but allowed them to change positions and attributes along with the twists and turns of the plot. In its US variants, soap

opera also offered a rather old-fashioned, but still seductive, glamour. Most crucially though, as feminist critics have shown, it reversed traditional values by privileging the feminine world in which emotion, empathy and talk were the means by which life could best be understood and managed. The parallels between the fictional world of soaps and the turmoil which Diana's marital unhappiness generated in the House of Windsor made the soap format an irresistible framework for understanding her life; and indeed the values of soaps were those expressed by Diana herself – the need to talk, the need to hug – and drew on the same discourses of feminine understanding and popular psychology.

The soap opera parallels perhaps explain the somewhat uneasy fit between Diana and the news story, particularly on television and in the broadsheet press. Stories about Diana carried to an extreme degree the tendency of news stories to personification, to the use of people to stand in for underlying issues: the economy, politics, the environment. For much of her married life, Diana was literally speechless: it was clearly her person, her body, which was the news. Her *being there* was what was important. This emphasis on simple presence was not sufficient for 'serious' reporting, but even when a story did develop it rarely fitted the agenda of the public sphere. The breakup of the marriage, it was argued, was a personal matter, and Diana's behaviour was shocking because she privileged the personal in the public sphere. This can be seen most clearly in the *Panorama* interview, in which she used the language of romance (the much mocked 'Queen of Hearts') and soap opera in an interview in the BBC's most prestigious current-affairs slot. Very often, though, the Diana news story avoided this contradiction by placing her within the context of constitutional issues and histories of the Royal Family.

All these narrative formats provided

frameworks for placing and understanding Diana: they were not hidden structures, but deployed quite overtly. The impact of her death was such that these frameworks had to be reworked in an extraordinarily intense fashion – and in a way which turned ‘the people’ themselves, or more particularly Diana’s mourners, into writers of the story. Watching the news coverage, seeing and hearing people interviewed, listening to phone-ins, one had a sense of participants confident of their own expertise, and becoming more so during the week between the death and the funeral.

On the day of her death Diana at last became, unproblematically, a news story; and it was on that Sunday that the news media, particularly television and radio, had the greatest control of its telling. They responded with reports of particular events – the Royal Family’s church attendance, Charles’s journey to Paris to bring her body home – and with analysis and discussion largely from ‘experts’ – Court correspondents, churchmen, reporters. On that day the news agenda was very quickly established and the emphasis, and blame for the accident, placed on the activities of the paparazzi and the tabloid press. This had two functions: it allowed television journalists to distance themselves from the excesses of the popular press, and also produced a ‘serious’ issue for debate – the right to privacy. The discussions of that day were a classic example of the way in which news stories take hypotheses as fact and preclude alternative explanation. Monday’s announcement of the results of blood tests on the driver were shocking: not just for what was revealed, but for the way in which it threatened the neatness of the news story which had been established the previous day.

During the week that followed, however, the ‘experts’ found themselves less in control as the mourners began to participate in the event through laying flowers, signing condolences, radio phone-ins and television

interviews. Towards the end of the week, one Channel Four News featured interviews with people waiting to pay a last tribute. There was no commentary, and the anchorman concluded with the remark that reporters sent to the scene had discovered that people could speak for themselves. Kate Adie, the BBC’s respected foreign correspondent, frequently commented on this: ‘people are so articulate about it . . . they know what they want’, she reported from outside Buckingham Palace. Commentary on radio phone-ins was more critical and demanding than the experts could afford to be. People phoning in and mourners laying flowers criticized the Queen’s absence from London well before the press made it a headline issue later in the week. The traditional signifiers of royalty were studied for their usefulness in the cause of expressing grief, and refused if found wanting. The explanation for the absence of a flag flying at half mast over Buckingham Palace (the royal standard is flown only when the monarch is in residence) was deemed irrelevant: a flag had to be there so that it could say something ‘different’.

Public response drew on the narrative frameworks which had been used extensively in Diana’s life. In a literal sense, the death completed the narrative formats which up until then had lacked closure. The fairy-tale story required a perfect princess, and there were many who came forward as witnesses to Diana’s good works. Again, the personal testimony of the ordinary became more important than that of the rich and famous, since Diana’s goodness could precisely be confirmed by her concern for ‘the people’. This was an area with which the media felt quite comfortable, and footage of her visits to hospitals, hospices and charities featured strongly in news coverage. The fairy-tale element can also be seen in the way in which the happiness of her relationship with Dodi was insisted on by many of those interviewed. Harrods became one of the sites at which a final union between Diana and a

man could be celebrated. Ironically enough, the evidence for this final resolution of the fairy-tale had been the holiday photographs snatched by paparazzi.

Interestingly, though, many women among the mourners resisted the narrative of perfection and wanted to remember Diana as someone who changed things. They seemed to want a more flawed figure, whose faults lay precisely in her disruptive quality. This tale of disruption could be tamed somewhat by focusing on her position as a mother who fought for her children and for all children. But the notion of her rebellion against tradition, of a disruption which death should not be allowed to resolve in the manner of a classic narrative, was a persistent motif. While the woman as a disruptive element is at the heart of many soap operas, the abrupt ending of Diana's story made soap opera less useful as a narrative format: 'I can't believe there won't be another photograph', said one commentator. What is striking, however, is the dominance of soap opera values in the way in which people spoke about Diana's death. Talk about private feelings – the staple of soap opera – was valued as the best way of expressing grief, and indeed as a sign of grief itself. In this discourse the refusal of the Queen and Charles to speak was taken to signify a lack of grief, and was harshly criticized. News story legitimations – the causes of the crash, privacy investigation – seemed less and less appropriate as the values of the private sphere asserted that the news story was precisely about the expression of grief and the assuaging of loss. For those outside this 'feminine' discourse, there was very little space in which to speak.

The narrative frameworks I am describing were not hidden structures, and could be consciously deployed. These constructions helped to explain the Diana who for most people had been available only through the media. Ambivalence about the fictional formats which starred a real person might explain people's desire to outflank the media

and reach Diana by other routes. Evidence for this can be seen in two phenomena: the witness provided by those who had met Diana, and the need to be physically present. Those who had met Diana – journalists, politicians, friends – told their stories, but, critically, the accounts of 'ordinary people' always emphasized physical proximity, as if touch were the means whereby the reality of her presence could be asserted – sight being compromised by the media's endless use of photographs. Physical presence at the sites of mourning and at the funeral was also spoken of as a way of experiencing the event fully. Television offered a better view, but not the smell of the flowers, the touch of the crowds. Ironically, the narratives of presence were recounted through the media, and the crowds at the Palaces became a media event in which those present used the media to tell those who relied on the media what they were missing.

Christine Geraghty

Image

The death of Diana, Princess of Wales, unleashed a deluge of media coverage. Diana rapidly became a cathartic object of grief, a symbol of hope, caring and community, and bearer of many grand themes from personal transformation to 'people power'. Her life was framed by a series of narratives: from chrysalis to butterfly, from fairy-tale wedding, through 'crowded marriage' to tragic divorce. Her death was presented in poignant contrasts: loving mother; motherless boys; joy at last discovered, joy cruelly thwarted; famous woman, created by media image; woman, destroyed by media image.

Visual representations were central to the construction of this event. Within days the mass media were representing 'the strength of feeling' and 'national mourning' through capturing gesture and symbolism. Cameras

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panned the carpets of floral tributes, focusing on the guttering flame of a candle, the poignant message, the gift of a teddy bear. Visible acts of mourning were not only volunteered by 'the common people' but demanded of the Royal Family. In response to 'public demand', the union flag fluttered at half-mast at Buckingham Palace and television cameras focused hungrily on the physical interaction between Prince Charles and his sons.

But among all the visual symbolism, the most pervasive image was of Diana herself. The press produced tributes devoted entirely to photographs of her, with titles such as 'Diana: a life in pictures and front pages' (*Sun*, 2 September 1997). The face of 'the most photographed woman in the world' was used by mourners to adorn the gates of the Palaces. It was reproduced on commemorative plates, posters and T-shirts. Indeed, as if her image had become burnt upon the retina, some people even witnessed a miraculous vision of the princess, as she had looked in one of her magazine poses.

Diana's image also dominated television coverage. Footage of the princess interspersed commentary and news reports, and for several days, compilations of scenes from her life rounded off lunchtime and evening news bulletins. We were repeatedly presented with Diana in her wedding dress, in fashionable evening gowns or in casual wear with her boys. We saw Diana garlanded with flowers on a visit abroad, Diana in landmine protection gear. We saw the blonde and glowing princess, clad entirely in white, embracing a sick black child. Often these pictures were presented using cinematic conventions: soft focus; images framed with white lilies; shots played in slow motion, without any synchronous sound. These conventions, suggesting 'flashbacks' and dream sequences, signal that this is not 'live' coverage. They also carry a certain glamour, framing Diana in an angelic, 'not of this world' light.

While Diana's image was repeatedly displayed, her voice was rarely heard. Footage of the princess was literally mute, in death, Diana, creature of the modern media, became star of the silent screen. Most of the compilation tapes and images were wordless, or included only the most brief and mundane remarks. In one *Reporting Scotland* bulletin the only words from the princess were 'I don't eat breakfast' – a response to a cameraman's enquiry (BBC1, 31 August 1997, 18.05). The absence of words is partly attributable to the fact that Diana was not an orator in any traditional sense. It is also due to the restrictions under which the media and Diana herself were operating. (With the exception of the notorious *Panorama* interview, statements about her own life were largely made public through a form of ventriloquism, as with Andrew Morton's biography.) However, the absence of words was also testament to the power of Diana's image.

On the day she died, ITN was unusual in framing scenes from Diana's life with at least a few sentences spoken by the princess. Shots of her dancing, posing for *Vogue*, and cradling a child in her arms like a latter-day Madonna, were intercut with scenes from a public appearance at which she recited a poem. 'Life is mostly froth and bubble', she read, 'two things stand like stone, kindness in another's trouble, courage in your own' (ITN, 31 August 1997, 13.00).

The image of Diana as a woman who cared, and a woman who suffered, was a central motif in the coverage. Diana's 'troubles' were vividly 'revealed' through closeup shots of her looking tearful, and by illustrations of her estrangement from her husband: turning away from Prince Charles's kiss after a polo match, the couple in their car, staring coldly in opposite directions (ITN, 31 August 1997, 13.00). One particularly famous scene was repeatedly revisited: the princess sitting all alone in front of the Taj Mahal. Diana as victim,

hunted by the paparazzi, was also a recurring theme. Because of the manner of her death, photographers were themselves literally 'in the frame'. Television coverage showed wide-angle footage of Diana pursued by photographers, dodging and turning her back like a hunted animal to escape the circling cameras (ITN, 31 August 1997, 13.00).

Diana's compassion was portrayed through her visits to the sick and the homeless, and her laying on of hands. AIDS was the first area in which the significance of Diana's touch emerged – shaking hands ungloved, hugging and keeping bedside vigil with those considered social pariahs. At the time, sections of the media honoured her actions as 'courageous' and 'saintly', while others savagely attacked her. Nevertheless, Diana's actions were seen by many as proof that HIV was not transmissible by casual contact. It was Diana's then status *within* the establishment that made her touch so powerful (see Jenny Kitzinger, 'Visible and invisible women in AIDS discourse', in Doyal et al. [eds], *AIDS Setting a Feminist Agenda* [London: Taylor and Francis, 1994]).

Diana's involvement in AIDS marked the beginning of a transformation of her image. Her *touch* began to have meaning over and above its 'royal stamp'. This was quite explicit in the coverage of her death. Newspaper tributes after her death included photographs gathered under headings such as 'Diana the mother' or 'Diana the fashion icon'. Among these were pages devoted to her touch, with titles like 'Compassionate touch' (*News of the World*, 14 September 1997) and 'The caring side that saw Diana embrace the world' (*Daily Mail*, 1 September 1997). Television news repeatedly showed her running to embrace her sons, patting a child's knee, cupping an old woman's face, stroking a cheek and embracing a young boy, often with no indication of the nature of the event, nor of the identity of the object of her touch (for example, BBC1, 1 September 1997, 18.30).

Diana's story was essentially a story told in pictures, and in particular in television pictures. It is often remarked, not least by the media themselves, that 'Diana' was a creation of the modern mass media. She was, according to *USA Today* 'the princess of the MTV generation' and, according to the *Sunday Times*, 'first lady of the global village' (quoted in the *Guardian*, 3 September 1997; *Sunday Times*, 7 September 1997). Communications technology, continuous live news coverage and the expansion of radio and television coverage were central to the public experience of her life and death. The media coverage gave its consumers a sense of intimacy with Diana, of involvement in her story, and for many young women a sense of Diana's life as parallel to their own. The obsession with her life mirrored the growth in 'reality television', fly-on-the-wall documentaries and video-internet sites. Her story operated as a modern fairy-tale, soap opera and Oprah Winfrey show rolled into one. In addition, as Bryan Appleyard pointed out, when the final episode came, 'Diana dies everywhere and instantly - on the Internet, CNN and every television screen in the world, on the radio, in every newspaper, she was the first icon fully to live and die in the global village' (*Sunday Times*, 7 September 1997, p. 6).

However, such analyses ignore important distinctions between different media. Rather than generalizing about the imagery in the media as a whole, I want to isolate television, and explore the extent to which the *moving* image was essential to producing the Diana mythology and shaping the 'national shock and mourning'.

This analysis is informed by the fact that I do not own a television, and as a result, saw none of the television coverage of Diana's death until two weeks after the event. In the meantime I had relied on newspapers and radio for constructions of the event. When I did eventually watch the video recordings of the period between her death and her funeral

I was struck by the extra dimensions added by the television portraits and by the moving power of the moving image. Television imagery was able to portray the living princess in very particular ways, starkly framing her death and constructing a seamless unity of public grief.

At its most basic, television was able fully to capitalize on the power of Diana's image, providing hundreds and hundreds of images – not just the few dozen that could be packed into newspaper tributes. These pictures, unlike still photographs, could be juxtaposed with music, words, text or silence; and full use was made of television's capacity for framing, editing and movement.

Part of Diana's appeal lay in gesture and movement. Her famous 'look' could not be fully captured in a still photograph. Its 'flirtatious' effect lay in eye movement, the intense glance followed by the shy look away. Her attraction lay not in 'posing' but in 'spontaneity'. It is no coincidence that standard formal paintings of her were said to appear insipid. In this sense Princess Diana was neither 'attractive' nor even simply photogenic, she was, above all, 'telegenic'. The oft repeated theme of 'touch' was also better illustrated by television's time frame for action. Television could show the prolonged stroking of a child's knee, the clasping of hands for several seconds, the intense and maintained gaze into the eyes of a sick child, Diana kneeling quietly beside a young blind man as he slowly and meticulously felt her face to construct a portrait of her in his mind (ITV, *Princess of the People*, 5 September 1997, 21.30). Such scenes showed not only 'the caring touch', but the extent to which Diana was open to the touch of others. In inviting as well as receiving touch, she also breached royal protocol (remember the outcry when the Australian Prime Minister placed his hand on the Queen's back).

The television camera not only captured movement, but also provided it. Several news

bulletins showed snapshots from private visits where no television cameras were present. The absence of television cameras was used to signal Diana's 'genuine commitment'. But, lest we miss their significance, the photographs were scanned minutely. In one photograph of Diana having her hand kissed by a young man, our gaze was directed from the man's lips, along Diana's arm and up to her face. Another snapshot was filmed to draw the viewer's eye to the princess's enthusiastic physical contact with others, focusing first on a resident in a battered women's refuge, still seated, holding out her hand, the camera scanned the image to reveal Diana herself, out of her chair, almost lunging across the table as she stretched to reach out to the other woman (*Princess of the People*).

Mobile framing was thus used with particular effect to communicate Diana's warmth. Above all, it presented her as vibrantly alive. It was this which made television the ideal medium for communicating the drama of her death. This is reinforced by the status of film and video recordings in western culture. The dead are immobile and silent, the living speak and move. Technology which reproduces the 'living' voice or moving image offers a far more startling conjuring up of the dead than other records. Film and video recordings seem more 'lifelike', we have learned to see them as closer simulations to 'the real thing'. We are acclimatized (relatively) to the dead leaving behind letters and photographs. The contrast between such 'frozen in time' records of life and the facts of death are a little less stark (at least for those who have no personal relationship with the dead). New technologies confront us with new manifestations of the departed, however. As answerphones became widespread, people encountered the shock of recorded messages replayed after the speaker's sudden death, and western culture is still getting used to video recordings of deceased family members.

In Diana's case, of course, most people

only ever knew her through media portraits. How could her death be absorbed when she 'lived on' as television viewers had always known her? How could we not be shocked by the contrast between the intellectual knowledge that she had died and the visual representation (even if now in slow motion) of Diana, 'so full of life'. (The security video footage of Diana leaving the Ritz moments before the accident, added an extra edge to such coverage).

Further drama was provided by the raw immediacy of television reporting. News reports of Diana's death displayed all the rough edges of 'live' coverage: the clips from CNN, Peter Sissons assigning the wrong name and gender to the BBC's correspondent in Paris, newscasters turning to blank screens where location shots were meant to appear. From the start this marked out these bulletins from their routine counterparts, branding the event with the status of a major disaster, worthy of instantaneous newswashes around the world. The emotional tempo was raised by the way in which journalists and newscasters, who traditionally scorn emotional displays, were visibly shocked and publicly stated that they were close to tears.

Mobile cameras fully exploited the dramatic potential of events. Both ITN and BBC news bulletins treated viewers to a car trip down the tunnel in which Diana was killed. As the camera shot down the tunnel in the front seat of a car we were informed that this was the route of her last journey. While the BBC took a straight line through the tunnel, ITN allowed the camera to swerve slightly towards the pillars of the underpass, and the sequence was cut before we emerged once more into the light (BBC1, 1 September 1997, 1800, BBC2, 1 September 1997, 22.30; ITN, 31 August 1997, 13.00).

Such camerawork was combined with dramatic juxtapositions. Bulletin after bulletin showed images of the princess and then cut to pictures of the mangled wreckage of the

car. Pat Kane, writing in *The Herald*, described his own experience of watching such reports. Every time he saw a television clip of Diana, he was: 'For a second, stunned by her tele-presence, you think: is she still alive then?' But almost instantly, the TV report will then transmit that image which is almost becoming a fetishistic object, a necessary visual punctuation . . . the S-class Merc, a knot of painted black metal, squished flat like a cheap toy car. . . . If sex, death, and technology were ever compacted into one object, this would be it.' Such repeated juxtapositions led him to suggest that the only person with anything 'original to say about this century-defining event' must be 'J.G. Ballard, controversial author of *Crash*' (*The Herald*, 4 September 1997, p. 17)

The final theme in Diana's post-mortem emerged in representations of public reaction to her death. While, the 'nation in mourning' was represented in all the media coverage, it was television images which most insistently presented a 'seamless unity in grief'. Self-consciously employing the double meaning of contemplation and imagery, BBC news bulletins used a compilation tape called 'Diana reflections'. The tape showed familiar scenes from her life, intercut with a singing choirboy, and soundbites from representatives of diverse charities. It concluded by cutting between the different interviewees as each spoke, as if with one voice, a consecutive line from a prayer (BBC, 'Diana reflections', 5 September 1997). Elsewhere the television cameras displayed closeup shots of weeping faces, often then pulling back to show a massive crowd. The impression was that everyone was united in grief, that everyone was in tears.

It was not only the television viewer's gaze which was guided in particular ways. Images of Diana's face were often intercut with scenes of mourning, and giant portraits of the princess dominated studio discussions (*Princess of Wales: a Tribute*, BBC1, 31 August 1997, 20 00). News bulletin footage

panned from closeups of the princess's picture to writers in books of condolence (*Reporting Scotland*, BBC, 31 August 1997, 18.05; BBC, 5 September 1997, 21.30). In BBC coverage of the funeral, Diana's face was superimposed on a bird's-eye view from high in the roof of Westminster Abbey during the minute's silence. Her downcast and compassionate gaze appeared to fall on the scene below (6 September 1997).

Unusually, television coverage also made dramatic use of silence. The Channel 5 news on the day of Diana's death, for example, simply opened with a picture of the princess, with no caption. This image was held for a few seconds of silence before the written words appeared: Diana, Princess of Wales, 1961-1997 (Channel 5, 31 August 1997, 12.50). Silence was even more marked in the broadcast of the funeral which was dominated by the clipclap of horses' hooves as they pulled Diana's coffin through the still streets of London. Here, silence was not created by editorial muting of the ambient sound, silence *was* the sound. As Anthony Troon of *The Scotsman* commented, television 'is supposed to be the medium which abhors an audio vacuum, where every unforgiving minute has to be filled with prattle. But at times on Saturday, it seemed that the leaden quiet of the London millions had presented the medium with an unexpected challenge. They were going to have to record hush. Their commentators were going to have to shut up. Hush was the story.' (*The Scotsman*, 8 September 1997, p. 26)

In a multimedia world, momentous events and famous people are created through many forms: television, radio, newspapers, magazines and often, too, the internet. But television has a special role. Of the multitude of media through which 'Diana' was created, television was certainly the most important. Princesses feature in many stories, and powerful narratives which predate television inform the Diana myth. A troubled and troublesome princess, a young life cut short,

two motherless princes – all these are events with a narrative force which would have entered the repertoire of myth without the aid of television. But the Diana icon that we know depends on images, and especially on the everyday familiarity and moving power of television images.

And yet television, and indeed the media as a whole, cannot contain every aspect of Diana. Her life was not a script, her death was not staged; and public response, though choreographed by the media, sometimes exceeded its mediation. The silence of the crowd at Diana's funeral was broken as the people applauded her brother's tribute. Were the crowds watching on the big screens outside Westminster Abbey assuming the role of mourners, fans or protesters? As the applause rolled into the Abbey itself, what kind of spiral was set up between the outdoor screens, the public, the Abbey and television? The limitations of an exclusively media-based analysis must also be recognized at another level. The myth of Diana now reaches beyond the confines of the media, and its meanings cannot be understood through analysis of media content alone. How did people make sense of, and work with, Diana's image as a vehicle for their own aspirations, fears and desires? How did her image take on its own momentum in a particular historical and political context? What forms of cultural production took place beyond the screen? How did people's experience of her death intersect with what they saw and heard around them in the streets? While writing this essay I repeatedly asked people I met to describe their most memorable image from the previous two weeks. I was struck by the extent to which they not only described television images but also their own encounters with strangers, the reactions of friends and relatives, their own direct experiences of the rituals of mourning. The 'Diana phenomenon' was created through the mass media, but has become imprinted on the collective memory. Diana the media-created

icon outlives and now overreaches its progenitor.

Jenny Kitzinger

Nation

In the week following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, there was a palpable sense of unease regarding the location of boundaries between the global, the national, the popular and the personal. The tensions circulated at least in part around the following issues: she was an international phenomenon who also had to be reclaimed as a national one; she was part of the Establishment, however problematically, but also a popular icon perceived as being in opposition to it; she was a public figure, but some, at least, experienced her death as a personal loss. Media commentaries that week and beyond became obsessed by these issues, but for me this sense of unease was best epitomized by Tony Blair's announcements and the Queen's broadcast, and finally crystallized in the ways in which the funeral service was televised by the BBC and ITV.

In his first response to the news, Blair spoke about the reactions of 'the whole of our country', and then referred to the feelings of 'people not just in Britain but throughout the world' – a phrase which was no doubt intended to sound soothingly inclusive, but which somehow only succeeded in underlining an opposition. Later that morning, he again spoke of 'this country' before substituting a qualified use of the word 'nation': 'We are today a nation, in Britain, in a state of shock'. Although this was a move which acknowledged his global audience (leave out the 'in Britain' and it sounds much more parochial), for a domestic audience aware of the looming devolution referenda, it perhaps also carried the unfortunate implication that in a British context, the word 'nation' no longer

possessed a clearly defined referent. In his second announcement, Blair again used the awkward 'in Britain – throughout the world', before adapting it with his trademark term: 'the people everywhere, not just here in Britain but everywhere . . .'. By so doing, and by calling Diana 'the people's princess', Blair managed temporarily to surmount the problems of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in the inter/national binary. But his use of the term 'the people' set up another opposition which was to require very careful handling as the week wore on.

Although at times 'the people' were synonymous with 'the nation', there were moments when they became the antithesis of the nation-as-Establishment. With demands for the funeral route to be lengthened, for the Queen to make a broadcast, and for the union flag to fly at half mast over Buckingham Palace, 'the people' became citizens rather than subjects, and Blair was in the tricky position of having simultaneously to side with the Royal Family and to align the Government with popular sentiment. Paradoxically, in his third official statement on the Wednesday, he was at pains to point out not that the people of Britain shared the grief of the Royal Family, but that 'they share our grief'.

It was in this announcement that the public/personal distinction also came to the fore. In his first statement Blair had said that Diana would be mourned 'as a friend', but now he spoke 'not just of national loss but personal loss', in what seemed to be an attempt to contain popular feeling by once again recasting 'the people' as 'the nation'. Blair somehow managed to pull off this makeshift elision, and the painstakingly balanced rhetorical structure he had succeeded in building continued to hold up. With the Queen's broadcast on the Friday, however, it all started to look a bit shaky again.

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The ways in which the Queen's statement negotiated the tensions outlined so far only served to strengthen that sense, which had

been intensifying throughout the week, of an institution trying desperately to catch up with the times and never quite succeeding. The extent to which the Royal Family and its advisors were still out of synch at this point was demonstrated by the problems the Queen's statement had in maintaining Blair's elisions. The Queen's reference to the sadness expressed 'throughout Britain and around the world' echoed Blair's initial phrase and worked well enough, even if things had moved on since then; but her statement that the funeral was 'a chance to show to the whole world the British nation united in grief and respect' threatened the tentative sense of inclusiveness that he had subsequently created. All of a sudden, it was back to 'us and them', the British versus everyone else, the meaning of 'the nation' temporarily returning to the nation-as-Establishment rather than the nation-as-the-people, to the pedagogic rather than the performative (see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*).

Despite this, there was at least a passing reference to popular sentiment when the Queen mentioned the 'lessons to be drawn from . . . [Diana's] . . . life and from the extraordinary and moving reaction to her death', and brief attempts were made to acknowledge criticisms of the Royal Family's reaction and to establish a sense of solidarity. 'We have all been trying in our different ways to cope'; 'We have all felt those emotions in these last few days' It would perhaps have been too much to expect the Queen to acknowledge openly the relative popularity of Diana's much less formal style, let alone to start talking enthusiastically about 'the people'.

It was perhaps with the public/private binary that the Queen's speech was most successful. Not only did she acknowledge that 'Millions . . . never met . . . [Diana] but felt they knew her', but she also addressed us 'as . . . your Queen and as a grandmother'. Even if this was not very plausible, there was at

least a sense that she was trying, and so it was unfortunate that there was more of the headmistress than of the grandmother about her final behest that 'each and every one of us, thank God . . .'

Much could be said about the funeral service itself, and particularly about Earl Spencer's tribute; but the different ways in which the BBC and ITV handled it – in terms of their emphasis on its national character, and in how they addressed the official versus the popular, and the public versus the personal – is perhaps of more immediate relevance here. The BBC made much more of the national element, the commentary just prior to the beginning of the service terming it 'the focus of a nation's remarkable outpouring of grief and affection'. Although there was no direct reference to the Englishness (as opposed to the Britishness) of the event, there was a close shave with mention of the private funeral later to take place 'in a green corner of Northamptonshire'. But balance of sorts was attempted with an instructive black flash at the bottom of the screen informing us when the choir sang 'Air from County Derry', and shots of the crowd holding Welsh dragon flags for 'Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer', with the accompanying commentary, 'For the Princess of Wales, a great Welsh hymn', just in case we missed its significance. If there were any implicit Scottish references in the service, however, then the BBC, at least, did not comment on them. At the end of the service there was an attempt to return to the national theme, as we were reminded: 'For one minute the whole nation keeps silence'.

When it came to dealing with the official versus the popular the BBC, not surprisingly, took a conservative line. This was perhaps best expressed via the camera work, which was at times reminiscent of *Songs of Praise*, and at others bore a striking similarity to a televised display of synchronized swimming. A sense of formality and distance was

achieved by the use of highly composed shots of stained glass windows – often with a didactically Christian content – and Abbey architecture, as well as by some strange shots of the coffin, the candles, and the patterned floor from directly overhead. There were relatively few shots of the crowd outside, though the superimposition on a shot of the Abbey interior of a slowly fading picture of Diana could perhaps be read as a concession to the popular. The predominant use of aerial and crane shots with relatively few eye-level shots, a frequent use of slight diagonals for filming speakers, and ruthless editing when it came to shots of the chief mourners, all resulted in the creation of anything but a personal tone.

With ITV, there was less emphasis on the national and a much more popular and personal feel. Perhaps because there was less 'educational' commentary during the service itself, there were fewer references to the nation. Instead, ITV went for 'the people's' approach, with more shots of celebrities from the worlds of pop and fashion, a greater number of shots of the crowd outside, and an emphasis on the diversity of its members. Indeed, it was as if ITV was attempting to represent the 'emotional' and 'marginalized' members of the rapidly redefined nation that the media had been hailing guiltily all week as their new constituency. There were fewer aerial and crane shots, more mid shots and closeups – often head-on rather than from a diagonal – and less deferential treatment of the chief mourners. Whereas the BBC gave us shots of the backs of the Princes laying their wreath, ITV ensured that we could at least see Prince Charles crossing himself. And if the ITV coverage was at times uncomfortably claustrophobic, there was also something particularly heartwrenching about the way in which the bearing of the coffin was shot. It was frequently filmed coming directly at us, or moving vertically down screen rather than being shot from a diagonal. At the end of the service, it repeatedly

disappeared from view before being shot in a particularly long take, setting up a feeling of suspense that we were about to lose it yet again. By contrast, the BBC's filming was less direct, and perhaps, therefore, less traumatic.

What these various discourses underlined for me was the fact that the nation really is an extremely delicate construct. It can only exist in opposition to other nations, resulting in a continuous reiteration of difference. Particularly during times of heightened emotion, it requires constant political containment and reclamation, so that the potential hysteria of the leaderless group becomes aligned with, and neutralized by, the structures of the State. As someone pointed out, what might have happened had all this occurred under the previous Government is something that hardly bears thinking about. Instead, with skilful political handling, 'the people' could be allowed their moment of triumph before being firmly recast as New Labour's 'New Nation'. But perhaps what was most interesting about these discourses was that they raised the question of whether there really was a tension between national and personal mourning for Diana. For perhaps mourning a public figure and possessing a sense of nationhood are both based on identification, and the nation is only ever a substitute, part of an ongoing process of mourning, for our most fundamental, originary losses.

Beth Edginton

Space

I live in central London. On the morning of the funeral I began to watch television as the cortege began its journey through Hyde Park, and then through familiar streets. Most striking perhaps was not the expected silent crowds nor the crunching hooves and feet, but the rhythmic tolling of the Westminster

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Abbey bell, once every minute: a kind of *passacaglia* to the morning's events. Some time around 10.15, as the procession neared Whitehall, my wife and I decided to walk to the Abbey, not in the expectation of actually seeing anything – that is not in the expectation of seeing *her* – but more to take in the atmosphere, the silence, the emptiness of the city, the strangeness of it all; and of course, though perhaps more self-consciously, to participate in some way, to share, to claim, to own a piece of it.

We left the television on: the rest of the household was beginning to emerge. And we could hear the bell continuing to toll as we walked down the stairs to the front door and out into the sunshine. At the threshold we could still hear it, but now it came not from the television but from the Abbey itself. It was *real*. The same bell. The same sound. But *real*. We had in some simple but mysterious way punctured media space, moved away from mediated reflection and representation and into experience. In that moment we had seamlessly mimicked the actions of the millions who left the safe, domestic unambiguity of media representation and made the pilgrimage to London during those extraordinary days before, during and even after, the funeral.

It is this passage from, this escape from, this *appropriation of*, media space on which I want to reflect here, in the recognition of course that the relationship is more insidious and more complicated than can be encompassed in a few pages. The question I want to address is this: how and why is it that as the world media went into spasm on the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, millions upon millions of ordinary folk (myself among them) decided to get up out of their armchairs, leave their front rooms, take the commuter train and *occupy* public space – and, indeed, public time, since the public holiday that was the funeral was not declared as such; and the funeral itself, by all accounts, was created to fulfil the projections

of those who wanted to be, needed to be, on the streets beside her.

Many explanations of this behaviour have already been offered. The key words have been mass hysteria, religious fervour, media manipulation. Each privileges a dimension of (mostly gendered) vulnerability, in which observed behaviour (and *pace* Max Weber, it is behaviour rather than motivated action that is being addressed) is defined, psychoanalytically, spiritually or sociologically, through a frame that gives little or no credibility to the capacity of individuals to take charge of, or responsibility for, what they feel, believe in or do. To be sure, it is easy to be seduced into the opposite position, to romanticize our freedom from the collective forces of contemporary culture, to exaggerate the capacities of individuals to determine and to define for themselves their own place in mass society. Both positions have truth within them. Each, on its own, is untenable. At issue of course, now, is how to understand the specificities, not the generalities, of these responses and the relationships they express and engender.

Why Diana?

Well, she was beautiful. She was young. She was vulnerable. She was a princess. She was an ex-member of a royal family riven by dissent and tortured by decline. She was from time to time, and perhaps increasingly, able to use the media for her own ends, assuming that she knew what those ends were and could hold on to that knowledge long enough. In the crosscurrents of contemporary mythology, her life was myth supreme. As one card pinned to a tree in the Mall poignantly put it, 'Diana, you were not allowed to live your own fairy-tale', an observation that perhaps (mis) recognizes the tragic paradox the fairy-tale inevitably sustains.

For me the key event in this fairy-tale, more Grimm than Andersen perhaps, was the *Panorama* interview of 1995. In that interview, and of course in the consequent

media response which electrifyingly fanned and intensified its content, Diana broke the bounds, and like those who subsequently occupied public space in her name, punctured the conventions of the media's representation of royalty.

These conventions, and they have been well analysed by David Chaney, involve the emergence of an increasing tension between public and private, symbol and reality. The construction of the royal family as media figures, as the symbolic centre of Britain's forlorn attempt at nation building during the twentieth century, involved a delicate manoeuvre to preserve its status, while at the same time making it accessible and human. The parallels with the Hollywood star system have been noted, and are intensely relevant, as Elton John's choice of musical epitaph made crystal clear. While it is certain that television was a key medium in this project, and the 1953 Coronation its beginning, Diana's wedding involved a major shift of gear (my house is still cluttered with wedding memorabilia, including a fine tin tea tray and an equally fine tea caddy), a shift in which, wittingly or unwittingly, the Palace colluded.

How were they to know that the project could not but be doomed; that the tension between public pomp and private passion could only be fatal? How could they anticipate the carnivorous appetite of the media, domesticating the wild symbolic for mass consumption? Until Diana, and perhaps especially until that television interview, the tensions and contradictions were being managed – just. But she blew it. She blew it all away.

The *Panorama* interview created a new space, a space that was outside the media frame, though essentially still contained by it. The balance between symbol and reality had, possibly permanently, been shifted: not because she attacked the Palace (though that was hardly likely to be inconsequential) but because she displayed more humanity than

she was permitted. Of course, all of this was premeditated, much of it coached, and some of it probably disingenuous. Yet the desire to be a 'Queen of Hearts' (as much as the achievement of becoming the 'People's Princess') severed the head, and enabled her to occupy – though still as symbol – a transcendent space. The hagiography began at that moment. What was signified above all was the possibility of breaking the bounds. It was a lesson that was to be vividly learned, one which was reproduced by the million in the actions of those who subsequently broke their own media bounds and, although still contained and indeed increasingly exploited by the media, occupied the streets of London.

Who placed the first flower?

We are told that, in the media age, there is no escape from the simulacra. That everything we touch is mediated, transformed, poisoned by media. That the boundaries between reality and fantasy, truth and falsehood, fact and fiction can no longer be determined, are no longer any use. This is indeed what we are told. But such a position downgrades experience to insignificance. It is empirically vacuous. It is frighteningly amoral. Even if it is easy to exaggerate the power of the popular demonstration (which was far from being a popular revolt) and to intimate, as the press have not been slow to do, that this might signal the end of the monarchy, indeed the end of life in Britain as we know it; and even if the Republic is not yet at hand, it would be a terrible mistake to consign the actions and feelings of so many to the dustbin of mediation.

To walk among those who gathered before and during the funeral was to walk amongst (and this is not romance) ordinary people: families, generations, ethnically diverse, middle, most suburban, England, who were not just taking the media air, but actively participating in an event which without them would have been meaningless. There was tourism and voyeurism, of course (and I, in part, was both tourist and voyeur), but there

was also a powerful set of claims and connections women identifying with the woman, children identifying with the child, parents identifying with the parent, lovers with the lovers (it is amazing how many tributes included Dodi Fayed), dreamers with the shattered dreams. And these identifications, these connections, were acted upon. They were performed. The ritual was being invented in real time. And public space was being occupied. You could smell the lilies.

No matter that this whole performance was in turn appropriated, not to say encouraged and sustained, by the media themselves. The performance itself was a popular appropriation in which meanings were shared and in which shared experiences were forged

and would be remembered. And performance, indeed, is what it was, a 'doing and a thing done', drifting between past and present, presence and absence, consciousness and memory (Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics*). In this performance, performed for the self and performed for the other, participants claimed ownership of an event which in those very claims clawed it back from the clutches of the media. In this performance, daily played out both in front of, and beyond the reach of, television cameras and the notebooks of journalists, we put our own stamp on things. And this piece is yet another attempt to do just that.

Roger Silverstone

reports

Screen Studies Conference, Glasgow, 27–29 June 1997

There certainly was a buzz around the *Screen Studies Conference* this year. Not only was there the excitement of the new venue, the brand new Centre for the Study of Theatre, Film and Television at Glasgow University – an intelligently and beautifully redesigned church that has been transformed into a multi-functional media and performance arts centre – there was also a feeling that a lot of other things were new – new faces, new ideas, new tensions – but all within the warm atmosphere generated as always by the *Screen Studies Conference* (largely thanks to the organizers, it has to be said). In fact, on this idea of ‘newness’ it might be more appropriate to say that there was an interesting clash between the ‘ancients’ (film studies scholars whose careers began in the 1970s) and the ‘moderns’ (new scholars of the 1990s). A clash, or tension, which started with the framing/mise en scene effect of the plenary sessions of which there were only two (regrettably a closing plenary was not programmed this year). The opening Friday-evening plenary (Research Resources) offered tantalizingly back-and-forward-to-the-future scenarios for film studies. First the realizable dreams of digitalized information flow (thanks to the Performing Arts Data Service) and, second, the study (on the Web or in the flesh) of popular film archives (at the newly established Bill Douglas Centre at Exeter University).

If webbing the present met webbing the past in some kind of harmonious synchronous immediacy in this plenary session, the same could not be said of the second plenary on the Saturday morning (Film and Television Studies in the 1990s). Though not exactly multimedia-phobes, speakers in this session were asking hard questions about the future

of film studies in the age of multimedia technology. This session, which primarily addressed the changes in film studies over the past twenty years, looked at the possible deleterious effects of an over-evaluation of digitalized technology over intellectual discourses. The plea in this session – that new scholars should not forget or gloss over the significance of the film theory debates of the 1970s, nor forget all the hard work of putting film studies on the map during that same decade – was, however, well matched by the earlier plenary session’s presentation of where film studies can become a growth area in terms of digitalization and the exploitation of film archives on the Web.

Interestingly, it was thanks to the second plenary that a crucial debate – between the high modernism of 1970s theory and the postmodern pluralism of the 1990s – was initiated. However, it was one that was not actually followed-up in the formal sessions. This is a pity, perhaps, and it may well be that it could be a focus for next year’s conference. Indeed, the notion put forward by more established scholars, that theory and history were being neglected by the new scholars (a frequent if barely audible, because muttered, refrain in this conference) was never fully upfront. But it was liminally, even subtextually, always already present. However, as the panoply of papers made evident, to the argument that history no longer seemed to be a part of film studies came the reply that there were plenty more histories to be told; and that they were being told. It has to be said, though, that there was a relative youthful impatience with ‘early film theory’ (particularly psychoanalytic film theory). New theory now, unlike new Labour perhaps, is an amazing pot-pourri of approaches, rich and diverse and precisely neither consolidated, nor overly structuralist, nor formalistic. It is refreshingly fun, but earlier theory it is not.

The debate, then, that could have taken place between ‘history and theory’ and

'histories and theories' is one yet to be had. However, despite this tension between the high modernist position of theory and the pluralistic postmodernist position of 'anything is up for analysis', the fear that the new and younger scholars were uniformly and univocally anti-psychology and anti-history was not fully borne out by their papers, even though a great many of them focused on other debates (national cinemas, bio-tourism and bio-terrorism in sci-fi movies, fashion and design, questions of identity and hybridity, and other complex issues around representation).

A second critical issue raised by the interfacing of the two plenary sessions – multimedia and digital technology and the threat it poses as a new discipline to film and television studies – again went largely undebated during the conference, but could be the focus for a future meeting. Indeed, given the new challenges presented to film and television studies by the new digital technology, the Saturday plenary session (particularly the voice representing film studies as they are taught in the USA) stressed the importance of cross-disciplinarity. This feeling that film and television studies cannot afford to remain in splendid isolation, and must mix in with popular culture studies and the new media is perhaps less of an issue for European film and television studies, where this already happens. However, given the continued budget restrictions European universities face, it is worthwhile thinking where else (if not in multimedia) film studies might forge new alliances. Other obvious areas of cohabitation are: film *and* modern languages (also potentially under financial threat), film *and* history, film *and* social sciences. In other words, alliances ought be sought across and between disciplines. And whilst interdisciplinarity is a concept much bandied about in British universities (particularly by vice-chancellors) it is presently one that is very difficult to practice given arcane academic structures. How to

move forward on this issue is also a timely debate.

As with all conferences, the quality of papers was mixed and what will be remembered are the tours de force, the splendid hospitality and the conference style. Caroline Beven's role in the conference organization deserves warm praise and thanks. It is easy to be critical of conferences with hindsight, but what I really appreciated about this year's *Screen Studies Conference* was, first, how much attention had been paid to its smooth running and, second, the attempts to respond to certain helpful comments put forward by a series of conference reviews published in recent issues of *Screen*. In an earlier conference review by Janet Thumin (vol. 37, no. 4) which referred both to Richard Dyer's 1995 *Screen Studies Conference* review (vol. 37, no. 4) and Ann Gray's *Console-ing Passions* review (vol. 36, no. 4), she asks what may be expected of a scholarly conference. It seems to me that *Screen Studies Conference* this year went some way towards helping us achieve the frameworking of what might be a 'desired conference effect' which is surely a conference that is rich in ideas *and* debates.

As one would expect, the *Screen Studies Conference* is predominantly a UK affair, although other countries and continents were quite well represented. And it might now be time, especially since the venue is even more prestigious given its new physical environment, to invite (even to the point of partially funding) overseas speakers and scholars who are not from the Anglo-Saxon UK–USA axis. For example, China, India, Africa and Latin America are woefully under-represented in this international conference, and these are nations with emerging stories to tell and strong new ideas around the direction that theory/ies and history/ies need to take in their attempts to unthink Eurocentrism (or, more precisely, North-Westernism) In this context, plenary sessions could be used to platform new debates followed by workshops

or round-table discussions on these debates. This could be a way to move the conference away from the more traditional serve-and-volley of twenty-minute papers (based on one's current research) and towards framing new debates, making the conference a venue for new ideas, new theories. A think-tank where 'ancients' and 'moderns' can debate, argue and converse together

What was exciting in this year's *Screen Studies Conference* was the strongly felt presence of identifiable film studies' graduate schools. There was a definite sense of graduate-school student collectives – each collective with very different sets of interests, approaches and styles. All representatives were exemplary in meeting the twenty-minute allocation (supreme professionalism). The promotion of young scholars and scholarship is a hallmark of *Screen Studies Conferences* and it was appropriate in this context that the *Screen Award* (for the best article submitted to *Screen* in any given year) was bestowed on a young scholar (Lalitha Gopalan) at the Civic Reception.

This celebration of younger scholars was matched by another celebratory moment, this time at the opening of the conference with John Caughie's welcoming address. In his speech, Caughie stressed the importance of film history and also the vital role played by film librarianship in the organization, structuring of meaning, and the maintenance of the very materials that film scholars rely upon to conduct their research. It was both timely and more than appropriate, therefore, that he saluted the truly significant role played (embodied even) by Gillian Hartnoll at the British Film Institute Library over the past decades, as she has steered it through its organizational troughs and peaks. This role was given due public acknowledgement and recognition in the Queen's Birthday Honours' List this June.

Susan Hayward

The 9th New York City Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (The New Festival), June 5–15 1997

What constitutes a 'lesbian' or a 'gay' film? Which criteria should be privileged to provide the basis for decisions about which films or videos to include in a lesbian and gay film festival? Is it the author? Is it the number of the gay and lesbian characters? Is it the storyline or the narrative? Moreover, in the midst of the commodification of gay and lesbian images and identities within the (heterosexual) public sphere, what risks should a festival address, not only in relation to the gay and lesbian community but also in relation to gay and lesbian filmmakers? In 1997 we have more than ever reached a point when these questions deserve very close attention.

The 9th Annual New Festival (New York City Lesbian and Gay Film Festival) certainly did not escape the politics surrounding the determination and categorization of works by and/or featuring queers. The New Festival received over four hundred titles by and about gay men and lesbians. The Program Committee (led by director Robin Vachel) obviously did a tremendous job, cutting this down to two hundred titles, and organizing ninety different programmes screened at two different venues. In addition, the New Festival programmed several lecture-presentations (among others, one on television by Sasha Torres and one on film by Mandy Merck) and a CD-Rom presentation. The Program Committee did actually consolidate the diversity emerging from gay and lesbian filmmakers. For instance, several anniversary and retrospective programmes served to distinguish this year's festival from previous ones. Such special gay/lesbian milestones included an 'Independent Series' featuring programmes celebrating the work of Women Make Movies, Electronic Arts Intermix, Third World Newsreel, Film-makers's Cooperative, and Su Friedrich.

In the midst of the mainstreaming of gay

or round-table discussions on these debates. This could be a way to move the conference away from the more traditional serve-and-volley of twenty-minute papers (based on one's current research) and towards framing new debates, making the conference a venue for new ideas, new theories. A think-tank where 'ancients' and 'moderns' can debate, argue and converse together

What was exciting in this year's *Screen Studies Conference* was the strongly felt presence of identifiable film studies' graduate schools. There was a definite sense of graduate-school student collectives – each collective with very different sets of interests, approaches and styles. All representatives were exemplary in meeting the twenty-minute allocation (supreme professionalism). The promotion of young scholars and scholarship is a hallmark of *Screen Studies Conferences* and it was appropriate in this context that the *Screen Award* (for the best article submitted to *Screen* in any given year) was bestowed on a young scholar (Lalitha Gopalan) at the Civic Reception.

This celebration of younger scholars was matched by another celebratory moment, this time at the opening of the conference with John Caughie's welcoming address. In his speech, Caughie stressed the importance of film history and also the vital role played by film librarianship in the organization, structuring of meaning, and the maintenance of the very materials that film scholars rely upon to conduct their research. It was both timely and more than appropriate, therefore, that he saluted the truly significant role played (embodied even) by Gillian Hartnoll at the British Film Institute Library over the past decades, as she has steered it through its organizational troughs and peaks. This role was given due public acknowledgement and recognition in the Queen's Birthday Honours' List this June.

Susan Hayward

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and lesbian representation such enthusiasm for designing a specialized festival is worth mentioning, and is certainly reassuring. Additionally, in the war for the queer screens led by other festivals such as Sundance, the champion in the promotion of 'Queerwood' within a straight context in the USA, or Le Festival du nouveau cinéma et de la vidéo, in Montréal (during which were premiered New Festival films like *The Delta*), one cannot dismiss the fact that the specificity and originality of gay and lesbian film festivals need to be strongly asserted.

But enthusiasm is not always a substitute for quality or challenging work. For the few inspired works that I saw at the New Festival (including *Perverved Justice*, a documentary made for British television; *MURDER and murder*, the latest (semi-autobiographical) film by Yvonne Rainer; *The Delta*, a 'New South' film by Memphis, Tennessee-born Ira Sachs; and *Love Story*, a moving video by British filmmaker Catrine Clay), there were numerous ones that did not fall into this category, such as two commercially released features: the insipid *It's in the Water* (Kelli Herd, US, 35 mm, 1996), and the excruciating *Entwined* (Raquel Cecilia Harrington, US, 1997).

Looking back at the Festival now, a number of questions continue to trouble me. First, if we can start with the presupposition that the films by and about lesbians represent some sense of current popular lesbian discourse, then what are some of the things that lesbians are interested in talking about? If I look at what was presented at this year's edition, besides sex and couples (not necessarily a contradiction here), lesbians like to talk about one central thing: money. In the rubric of lesbians who love money, want to make a buck, get famous, and be widely seen, the New Festival programmed *Zero Budget* (Emma Hindley, UK, video, 1996), half a testimonial, half a celebration of lesbians who have apparently 'succeeded' in the film business – or are about to. The initial idea could have been interesting and

informative – a how-to manual for showing aspiring lesbian film and videomakers with small, if not non-existent, production budgets how to create and manage their film productions, despite a daunting industry. But instead, Hindley produced a dykodrama of some stars of the lesbian film scene, offering us a quite irritating step-by-step recipe of 'how to marry a millionaire' and remain a 'true lesbian'. Punctuated by the over-exposure of the tired breakup narrative of the Troche-Turner couple of *Go Fish*' fame, the video quickly becomes a superficial montage that does not tell us much about the specificity of independent lesbian work within a profit-driven, commercial industry.

The program ended with *Perverved Justice* (Donna Clark, UK, video, 1996), a fascinating British documentary about the inordinately high number of lesbians on death row in US prisons. I feared this might prove to be a redigested version of Nick Broomfield's previous *Aileen Wuornos. The Selling of a Serial Killer*, but on the contrary, Clark's documentary offered an insightful investigation of why it is that so many lesbians compose this wall of women who are sentenced to death. The documentary appeared even more powerful after having witnessed the star conundrum and privilege-obsessed egocentrism of *Zero Budget* and *Rachel Williams* (Mike Cunliffe, UK, video), another money gig involving the famous newly-lesbian supermodel and her rock star girlfriend.

Speaking of grandeur, just a note about the decision to screen *Entwined*. If the *raison d'être* of a festival is financially secured by the screening of big feature movies that will bring in a big crowd, one has to wonder how *Entwined* will fare outside of a festival context. Poorly scripted, badly acted, the film tells the story of a super-babe student who falls in love with a super-babe film professor in a Miami decor that made me long for the tacky pink clash venue of Mike Nichols's *Birdcage*. The millionth version of the 'I'm in

love with my school teacher' narrative, *Entwined* moved predictably through a list of clichés, where class (the professor is involved with a butch, working-class cop who beats her up) and race (the student super babe is involved with a Cuban career woman who is abusively controlling) are trivialized.

Second, what kind of public space does a lesbian and gay festival offer to gay and lesbian viewers? Although work by Latino, black and Asian queers is still marginal, the New Festival managed to screen some important new material in the Third World Newsreel retrospective programme. I was most surprised by *Viva Eu!* (Tania Cypriano, Brazil, video, 1989). The video follows the last 'great' moments of Wilton Braga, a Brazilian artist and designer who died from AIDS. Opening unexpectedly and seemingly awkwardly by a sort of talking head update from director Tania Cypriano, the film succeeded in capturing – without any voyeurism – some poignant moments. In a quite daring scene, we see Braga dancing naked, his body scarred by KS lesions. The moment is moving, almost like a *Cérémonie des Adieux* mise en scene by a friend.

One of the most anticipated works of the festival was *Chocolate Babies* (Stephen Winter, US, 16mm, 1996). Premiered in NYC, the audience was packed by actors and friends of the film crew, in the carnivalesque ambiance that makes gay and lesbian festivals quite unique. A variation on Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames*, *Chocolate Babies* tells the story of an all-black drag queen commando unit that terrorizes city politicians, bombarding them with the urgency of the AIDS crisis. A film of characters, *Chocolate Babies* seduces the viewer more for the excellence of its acting – some of the one-liners are marvellous, and the actors play with witty spirit – than for its overall mastering of politics. If the film betrays an obvious misogyny in its depiction of the female characters, Stephen Winter shows enough

originality to make us hope that the next project will be more sensitive.

Two films created by directors from the US South were also programmed. If *It's in the Water* from Texas evoked a bad episode of *Melrose Place* that makes Heather Locklear look like a true drag queen, Tennessee's *The Delta* (Ira Sachs, US, 16mm, 1996), with its low budget production and its interracial interclass intrigue, constituted without a doubt one of the 'big candies' of the New Festival. Set in Memphis, *The Delta* features two contrasting boys: Lincoln, a golden upper middle-class spoiled kid, and Minh, a black Vietnamese immigrant. Their encounter changes the golden boy's life for a day or two. What struck me about this film was the incredible *retenue* shown by the director to avoid any kind of mushy feeling. Instead, the film recalls a lot of the 1960s independent tone and aesthetics with a quite 1990s sense of politics in relation to race and love. In contrast to the clean, white, bourgeois culture to which the young hero, Lincoln, will return, the director shows the spectator the limitations of Minh's existence in the 'land of opportunity'. The film gives us hope because it avoids the annoying tendency in more and more features to show us the triumph of life for couples in a bourgeois love-nest. On the contrary, *The Delta* clearly reminds us of the racism and sexism that still inhabit contemporary youth cultures.

This brings me back to the type of documentaries screened at the New Festival. Among the selection were the rather repetitive and *déjà vu* 'fan' works – featuring, this year, all-time dyke faves Martina Navratilova and Jodie Foster, plus the usual Andrea Weiss – here, *A Bit of Scarlet*, codirected with the late Stuart Marshall. If fandom and gossip are central to lesbian and gay culture and history, too often the privileged treatment goes no further than an encyclopaedic knowledge. There is no real investment, no real intervention in these films, but only the celebration of positive images, which is a

shame. A good example of what I am arguing about here, in relation to documentary, is shown in *The Healers of 400 Parnassus* (Laura Gabbert, US, video, 1997) – another film about a San Francisco AIDS clinic praising those doctors with hearts. Rather than denouncing the fact that AIDS patients are still parked in specialized clinics and cannot rely on proper care across the health system, or remembering that not every PWA has the chance to live in a urban centre, Gabbert's video focused on the caretakers. We end up empathizing with the physicians, physician assistants and phlebotomists, and regard the 'patients' with a clinical gaze; the heroes of AIDS, in this context, are the physicians and the pharmaceutical companies. Too few films and videos now are treating the AIDS issue from the point of view of the person with HIV/AIDS. What adds to my rage is that this programme was poorly attended, compared to the glam dyke offering *Entwined* which was sold out. I was left wondering whether AIDS as a subject has lost its audience.

But sexual politics seduces if it deals with 'unusual suspects' such as *You Don't Know Dick* (Candance Schmerhorn and Bestor Cram, US, 1997) a documentary about female to male transsexuals. For those who were expecting a feminist critique of masculinity, the film might have appeared a provocation. *You Don't Know Dick* is everything but a celebration of female bodies. Essentialist in many ways ('I knew since I was three that I was a man') the film nevertheless manages to create a sensitive approach to an often talk-show-only topic, the still unknown culture of female-to-male transsexuality.

The New Festival this year gave a lot of visibility to works produced for television, which is certainly to be encouraged and hopefully maintained. Not only was this gesture tuned in to the development and the popularity of television studies among lesbians, scholars and fans, but it represented the dynamism of some of the most challenging works produced over the last

year. In this context, the decision of the Program Committee to invite Brown University scholar Sasha Torres to lecture on 'The Other Dyke TV: Lesbians in Mainstream Television', was certainly a strategic and witty initiative. However, the festival will have to clarify its expectations for such events in the future. If the lecture-presentation was a good chance to see, share and remember great television moments, Torres never got the full attention of the audience, her argument too often getting lost in the professional and academic conference tone that obviously does not suit such an audience. In contrast, University of Sussex film scholar and critic, Mandy Merck, with her lecture entitled 'The Lesbian Handjob: a Cinematic History of the Cinematic Handjob', took the pulse of her packed audience and played her 'hand' well, even if she also dealt us a few wild (Freudian) cards.

Finally, I would like to complete my tour of the 1997 New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival by reasserting the importance of gay and lesbian events. However, I remain concerned and a bit worried about the future of some festivals. For example, despite its centrality, the New York Festival was small, even smaller than Montréal's Image et Nation. Also, there were several filmmakers who were not invited, and here I would have welcomed the screening of lesbian feminist activist Jean Carlomusto's new video, *To Catch a Glimpse*. Carlomusto's most accomplished work so far deserved to be programmed at the New Festival. Yet it was premiered within an academic context, at the Console-ing Passions Conference, Montréal, 1997. I cannot help but think that the video would have constituted a great programme with Yvonne Rainer's *MURDER and murder*. Both focusing on medical technology and health issues directly affecting lesbians and women, the two works capture from within the rage at the power that institutions of medicine exercise over women. The choice to close the New Festival with Rainer's film was

certainly a judicious and challenging gesture. Rainer, an established filmmaker, had a retrospective of her work at the Museum of Modern Art at the same time as her newest film premiered at the New Festival. While the film follows the fictional story of two middle-aged lovers, it also demonstrates an incredible sensibility for still-taboo nonfiction issues such as ageing, desire and breast cancer. Rainer dissects all the lies and fears surrounding the mathematics of breast cancer. Both enraging and overwhelming, *MURDER and murder* offers a unique look at the medical and cultural discourses and stories that inform breast cancer. Appearing as herself in the film, dressed in a tuxedo opened at the front to reveal her ablated breast, Rainer teaches a lesson of aesthetics and politics to a new generation of lesbian filmmakers who think that being cute constitutes in itself the narrative frame of a good film.

Chantal Nadeau

My thanks to Joy Van Fugua for her festival-gazing and to the FCAR (Fonds des chercheurs et d'aide à la recherche) for their financial support

Readjusting the agenda: reply to Jan Olsson

It is with great interest we read Jan Olsson's response (*Screen*, vol. 38, no. 2) to our mapping of the field of Swedish film studies (*Screen*, vol. 37, no. 3) and the direction it is entering. At the same time, it is with slight disappointment we note that Professor Olsson, instead of addressing the broader questions on knowledge formation, and the positioning of film studies in relation to other fields producing knowledge on film that we outlined at the end of our article, uses authoritative power to counter our statements. As we fail to see how any of Professor Olsson's arguments invalidate our description, we will just comment briefly, and thereafter readjust the agenda to the more principal questions

which Professor Olsson does not address (or strategically avoids).

Let us first consider just one of Professor Olsson's objections to our description. Olsson 'contradicts' our evaluation of the important role that SFI had in the 'publishing of literature on film, *similar* to that of the British Film Institute' (emphasis added). In his reply, Olsson claims that nothing (beside the filmographies and the journal *Chaplin*) has been published. Even if we dismissed what is published by people outside of academia, as Olsson does, this would not be true. Several scholars (among them Professor Leif Furhammar and Dr Gosta Werner) have published books in the series on which SFI and the publisher Norstedts cooperated. However, this series also contained other forms of knowledge on film that has been of profound importance to the development of Swedish film research. This is not only a question of a petty evaluation of facts. Importantly, Olsson's dismissal of these publications is an example of the ongoing process of exclusion now defining the academic field of film studies.

Another important difference between us and Professor Olsson seems to be our different views on how to define reflexive debates on methodology – maybe even how the concept methodology should be defined at all (we cannot, for example, see exactly how 'issues related to meaning' are automatically connected to such a debate). As editors of one of the two scholarly journals on film in Sweden, we have seen few examples of such a debate, and there is an even more striking absence of such articles in any of the issues that have yet been published in Professor Olsson's *Aura*. The fact that we had to go abroad to provoke a reaction to these questions 'is a case in point'. It might be that these matters are discussed in courses and seminar rooms, but our interpretation is that when such things are not discussed publicly in articles and dissertations (where methodological discussions are embarrassingly

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absent) the debate tends to be defined by the most authoritative person present.

The objective of our article was, besides giving a brief historical account of how knowledge of film did advance in Sweden (for a more detailed account, see our article in *Nordicom Review*, no. 2 [1996]), to point to some possibilities for the future, and to suggest an agenda for a wider debate on research policy. As Bourdieu has laid out so eloquently in his analyses of the French academic field, the formation of disciplines and subdisciplines are often the result of social, rather than scientific, motives and struggles. Therefore it would be of great interest to have a debate on several levels (regional, national, international) on knowledge formation (what knowledge is privileged in film studies, who defines it, and for what reason?), research objects (what objects are privileged, by whom, and for what reason?), methodologies (which methodologies are privileged, by whom, and for what reason?), and so on. When we articulate a fear of elitism and an estrangement from other disciplines and fields of knowledge, it is with the background of the lack of public debate around such matters. In our article we pointed to the fact that from its inception film studies as a discipline in Sweden aimed at

covering three areas: first, history and theory of film; second, the psychology and sociology of film; and third, film pedagogies. We can see that today it has lost the latter two of these areas. And whatever could be said about the intervening period in the late 1970s and early 1980s (a period we in no way find as unproblematic as Professor Olsson seems to think we do), there were fragments of such a debate where competing interests argued against each other. We fear that this debate has been sacrificed on behalf of the consolidation of the discipline and of the department. We can understand that for administrative reasons this might at times be necessary, but in the long run we believe that it is an unfruitful path to follow for a research field. Most disciplines have their internal, albeit public, discussions of such matters, and the only reason why this is not the case in Sweden (which is the only research field about which we can possibly say anything, but we would welcome similar reports from other parts of the world) is, according to our interpretation, that this is repressed by some forces within the field. However, what is repressed often returns – and sometimes with a vengeance.

Goran Bolin and Michael Forsman

reviews

review:

Richard Collins and Christina Murrone, *New Media/New Policies: Media and Communications Strategies for the Future*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, 243 pp.

Jim McGuigan, *Culture and the Public Sphere*. London: Routledge, 1996, 220 pp.

DAVID OSWELL

To the critic, the policy maker is an arid character, poker-faced with stodgy prose. He – for it is always ‘he’ – lacks the flair or the carelessness of the critic. To the policy thinker, the critic works only with fiction, too removed from power to realize the weight of publicly wielded words. Over recent years the critic has begun to turn gamekeeper.¹ And with this turn a whole set of loyalties has become threatened. Those who once talked about texts, readings and resistance have started to think about institutions, industry and policy in a much more pragmatic manner. In the desire to make a claim, many have tended to forget the valuable contribution to a political economy of the media by writers such as James Curran, Nicholas Garnham, Graham Murdock and Philip Golding (to name but a few) and to ignore the important work of those writers from a more liberal tradition such as Jay Blumler and Dennis McQuail. Instead they have turned to the work of Michel Foucault for insight into the governance of culture and communications. In so doing, contributions to a critique of industry and institutional power have also turned to thoughts of dialogue or, in Bennett’s aptly coined phrase, ‘talking to the ISAs’ (the Ideological State Apparatuses).² Although the nature of this dialogue is decidedly uncertain, and much work still needs to

¹ I am thinking here of the work of, for example, Tony Bennett, ‘Putting policy into cultural studies’ in Lawrence Grossberg et al (eds), *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992) Stuart Cunningham, *Framing Culture Criticism and Policy in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992) Simon Frith, ‘Knowing one’s place: the culture of the cultural industries’ *Cultural Studies from Birmingham*, no. 1 (1991)

² Bennett, ‘Putting policy into cultural studies’

be done in thinking about the contribution of academic expert knowledge within the cultural/media/communications policy process, both *New Media/New Policies* and *Culture and the Public Sphere* offer, in their very different ways, significant points of discussion for those interested in the analysis of screen media. Both these books are important, not only in what they say, but in the routes they have marked out.

McGuigan pulls together a number of issues in his book, puts on a policy spin and makes them accessible to a student readership. The major strength of the book is that it draws together a number of debates into a single emergent intellectual field. He pursues a range of areas concerning cultural value, state control, the commodification of culture, regional policy, the heritage industry, 'race' and ethnicity, and censorship in order to explore the 'politics of culture'. His main focus is, as he suggests in his introduction and conclusion, the relation between 'critical reason' and 'practical politics': 'how can critical intellectuals be practical' and 'how can practical intellectuals be critical' (p. 190). The tension between critical and practical reason is played out in the book through a constant rubbing of Habermas against Foucault: here Foucault is figured as a theorist of the technical and Habermas of the critical. For McGuigan, cultural policy is a gem which has escaped the grasp of the committed intellectual. It is that which must be bagged in order for cultural studies to be meaningful. The main weakness of the book is that it is not clear how this is to be done. In what way is this a book on cultural policy?

Collins and Murrone, in their book, have a rather different objective. Collins, once editor of *Screen Education*, now lectures at the London School of Economics and is a Research Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), the left-of-centre think-tank that is one of the main policy engines for New Labour. His coauthor Christina Murrone, also at the IPPR, previously worked for London Economics, a key consultancy company in broadcasting and telecommunications research. *New Media/New Policies* is the end product of some research for the IPPR. This book is not simply an academic text. In the same way that Cento Veljanovski's edited collection *Freedom in Broadcasting* (for the libertarian Institute of Economic Affairs) was never simply a work of 'critical thinking', but the interpretative resource for neo-liberal conservative government policy-making,³ so too is Collins's and Murrone's book a resource for government. It too has resulted in a document invested with political authority and embedded within the networks of power – we need only see how many statements in the book translate into policies recently enacted or, perhaps, are about to be so (this is most visible in the discussion of a single media and communications regulatory body, Ofcom, and a new consumers council).

Thus *New Media/New Policies* and *Culture and the Public Sphere*

3 Cento Veljanovski (ed.), *Freedom in Broadcasting* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1989)

are very different texts. The manner of discourse is different, as are the interlocutors. Similarly, whereas the subject of McGuigan's book is more wide ranging and covers a broad field of issues in the domain of culture, Collins's and Murrioni's is focused on communications media (including film, broadcast and telecommunication services). Nevertheless, there are important points of convergence. Both books, for example, are cut with old and thorny debates concerning freedom of expression versus censorship, and state versus market, namely a concern with economic and political control; it is on these issues I will focus.

In relation to the issue of media freedom and censorship, McGuigan brings a fresh perspective to the debate. He wants to 'break out of the crude for-and-against way of framing the issues' (p. 154). This seems sensible given the stale nature of the current debate and the entrenched concerns about media 'influence' (that is, not simply 'effects').⁴ The chapter in which McGuigan discusses these issues opens with a dictionary definition of 'censor' and 'censorship'. The quotes beg a Foucauldian reading which might then explore the relation between 'censorship' and 'classification'; the term 'censor', for example, in its classical Latin usage, referred to the public official who classified material life in order to police it. Nevertheless, McGuigan runs with a post-Foucauldian line of thought, and explores the notion of 'moral regulation' which is defined in terms of the normalization of conduct. McGuigan uses Susan Curry Jansen's distinction between *regulative* censorship (which is official and prohibitive) and *constitutive* censorship (which refers to the social establishment of rules of discourse) to pose some important questions which go well beyond conventional accounts within this field. However, his discussion tends to treat the latter as a more unconscious and covert form of prohibition. As such, the discussion stays with a notion of power as repressive (censorship as ultimately prohibitive, rather than classifying). Foucault, it seems, is deployed not to rethink the concept of power, but to understand how it operates in the deep fabric of social interaction. Such thinking is also evident when McGuigan refers to the agency of state and market. He argues, for example, that 'the state *makes use of* panoptic power; so, however, does the market ...' (p. 158, italics mine). Not only is power held by state and market, but both are figured as omnipresent and omniscient.

In this chapter, a number of interesting questions are raised; but for all its hard work, it does not quite deliver, and this is true for much of the book. McGuigan picks up a lot of leads, but stops short of piecing the evidence together to form a bigger picture. The book is an open text for the reader to finish writing. Closure is something that McGuigan resists and implicitly this seems to be his main form of argumentation. Elsewhere in the book, McGuigan states that he is happy to resist judgement in favour of raising 'issues of purpose that

4 See Martin Baker and Julian Petley (eds), *Ill Effects the Media/Violence Debate* (London: Routledge 1997)

call into question, in the spirit of democratic debate, the ideological closures' of dominant discourses (p. 163). This is McGuigan's public sphere in practice: intellectual discussion lacking the seal of state or corporate recognition and power.

In contrast, Collins's and Murrioni's discourse lacks critical uncertainty. Each sentence has a clear function and is weighted with the authority of regulatory and legislative documents. Philosophical discussion is cut short by, for example, the stamp of Acts of Parliament, the European Convention on Human Rights, the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or the Tabachnik Report of the Board of Deputies of British Jews (1992). This is not a discussion of what is possible, but of what is technically feasible given the current regulative regimes and agencies. Discussion of the knowledges that legitimate or constitute forms of censorship is articulated through a legalistic discourse of 'the proven' and 'the weight of evidence'. This gives the book gravitas, but also makes the argument heavy going for those more used to the playful spin of cultural studies discourse. It also means that certain opportunities are missed. Whereas later in the book there is a discussion of *negative* regulation (which is concerned with 'preventing and forbidding certain actions') and *positive* regulation (which is concerned with 'encouraging certain types of behaviour' [p. 144]), in this chapter such a distinction is not brought to bear on the problem. Instead, the chapter seeks to provide an argument which will guarantee rights to freedom of expression and information. In so doing it leaves untouched the question of how policy initiatives can *produce* spaces for marginal voices or how they can *create* new voices. The argument stays within a discussion of the protection of rights rather than the constitution of communicative entitlements or speaking positions.

Both books also focus on the role and the structure of the BBC. While other commentators, notably Paddy Scannell, have argued that the BBC as a national broadcasting institution enriched and extended the democratic fabric of British society,⁵ the sanctity of such a public space – in which voices can be given to the voiceless – is understandably seen to be threatened by institutional changes at the BBC. McGuigan rightly identifies, with some concern, the rise of a new managerialism and market reasoning in the state-controlled and state-related agencies (p. 62). Public sector organizations have become caught up in the discourse of 'enterprise culture'. McGuigan sees this as an affect of Thatcherism and draws on Andrew Gamble's argument that central to the understanding of this formation is an understanding of the mix of a strong authoritarian state and a radical form of economic liberalism.⁶ Enterprise is the key discourse. It extends not simply to the governance of markets but to the organization of public sector companies and, some have argued, to the creation of new forms of selfhood.⁷ Many public officials have,

5 Paddy Scannell, *Public service broadcasting and modern life*, *Media, Culture and Society* vol 11, no 2 (1989)

6 Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State* (London: Macmillan 1994)

7 Nikolas Rose 'Governing the enterprising self', in P. Heelas and P. Morris (eds) *The Values of the Enterprise Culture: the Moral Debate* (London: Routledge 1989), Paul de Gay *Consumption and Identity at Work* (London: Sage, 1996)

to a certain extent, had their hands tied behind their backs, and can do little more than prostrate themselves in the face of these wider political shifts. As McGuigan argues, this is a result of the wider discursive infrastructure which makes it difficult to think outwith its dimensions. Nevertheless, some managers in the public sector have been more enthusiastic in their advocacy of these ideas and techniques than others. The current Director General of the BBC, John Birt, has upset a number of people as a result of the changes he has implemented and continues to implement. Any Reithian aversion to commerce has been stamped on, and a new coinage introduced: an acceptance of the utility of internal markets (in the form of 'producer choice'), greater reliance on independent production, outsourcing of work, and the introduction of a tier of accountants and managers. Even so, it is not clear whether another, differently inclined, Director General would have been able to withstand the Conservative government's attacks on the BBC.

Although clearly concerned about a top-heavy management structure, Collins and Murrion focus more on the issue of the accountability of the BBC. They do so in a manner that is deceptively sophisticated. Instead of arguing that the democratic function of the BBC needs to be protected from capitalist markets, they suggest that the BBC must be both accountable to the public *as well as* commercially successful. On the one hand, they argue that the governance of the BBC should be made more transparent to the public, and that mechanisms which have kept ordinary citizens at a distance from such governance should be democratized; namely that the BBC Board of Governors should be selected through an open and public process and that the decisions of governors should be open to public scrutiny. On the other hand, they argue that the BBC should be restructured, as it recently has been, into separate units with distinct administrative functions (scheduling and channel control, programme production, transmission and engineering, commercial exploitation) and that it should be freed to exploit its products and services for commercial gain, while at the same time continuing to be funded through the licence fee. Although these measures do not properly address the problems to which McGuigan refers, concerning the dominance of a managerialism in the BBC, they do go some way to resolving the practical concerns of matching public broadcasting with commercial viability.

Such discussions of the BBC might seem turgid in comparison to the flamboyance of some screen studies writing, but, as Stuart Cunningham has remarked, policy talk is 'ideas-thick' not 'ideas-rich'. Policy discourse 'is a ritualised, procedural, highly repetitious form of public discourse and is the expression of firm hierarchies of authority which define its intelligibility'.⁸ This is not to say that cultural criticism has any more freedom or that it is any more critical, but rather that policy discourse is necessarily constituted

⁸ Cunningham *Framing Culture*, p. 35

9 Bennett, Putting policy into cultural studies

within different networks of authority and within different cultures. In policy advocacy, formation and critique it is important to recognize that the constituency of listeners is not limited to left-wing, media and cultural studies academics. Moreover, the production of knowledge in this area is not confined to the academy, but broadens out to include think-tanks, consultancy companies, consumer bodies, regulators and so on. Thus, if we are serious about talking to the ISAs, we need to talk in a manner intelligible to the agents of change and to recognize the authority of particular forms of knowledge. This is important if only to present other forms of knowledge and modes of administration. But the business of talking to power has, according to Bennett and others, serious ramifications for the discipline (or field) of cultural/media/communications studies. According to Bennett, power operates less through symbolic forms and more through administration and management. As such, cultural studies should be in the business of producing 'cultural technicians' rather than 'cultural critics'.⁹ Where critics wave their pens, administrators do the legwork of operating and changing the networks of power.

10 Cunningham, *Framing Culture*

McGuigan is hostile to this shift and views Bennett as a turncoat from the political heartland of cultural studies. Bennett is stigmatized as a right-Foucauldian and is called to task for collapsing practice with the technical and technical know-how with policy. For McGuigan, 'questions of cultural policy are too important to be left solely to cultural technicians' (p. 188). In place of the cultural technician, McGuigan begins to identify a place for the public intellectual in policy calculations. Such a person would be concerned with *praxis* (the practical theorizing of the good and the just), rather than *techne* (the technical mastery of productive skills). Whereas the former is formed through communicative rationality, the latter is instrumental. McGuigan's introduction of this Habermasian distinction is important and takes the debate forward from Bennett's rather crude polemical opposition. Nevertheless, if the debate is about policy, why stop at Habermas? Why not raid existing research in policy studies for useful ideas? Why not make the rather basic, but crucial, distinction between analysis *for* policy and analysis *of* policy. Whereas Bennett's and McGuigan's work seems to be primarily the latter, Collins's and Murrioni's is clearly the former. And if we are to train students in media/cultural/communications policy, why not, as has been said before, shift the disciplinary ground so that cultural studies students become informed by economics, political science, law, history and statistics, as much as by literary theory, ethnography, and aesthetics¹⁰

Media/cultural/communications studies has, to its detriment, ignored economics and law. And yet it is these disciplines that have informed the political shifts within cultural and communications policy over the last twenty years (and more so, probably, than at any

other time). How can we contest, at a policy/political level, the liberalization of media and communications without an understanding of, and dialogue with, economists and the economic arguments? All too often critique replaces engagement. It is not surprising that in many of the important political debates in this area over the last few years, cultural and media studies academics have had little to say, or, rather, little to say that has been seriously listened to. But then how much has it cost the policy maker not to listen?

review:

Julia Knight (ed.), *Diverse Practices: a Critical Reader on British Video Art*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 1996, 384 pp.

DIMITRIS ELEFThERIoTIS

Diverse Practices offers a number of essays covering historical and critical aspects of British video art from its early days in the 1960s up to the 1990s. Despite the uneven quality of the essays and some methodological flaws, the collection offers a valuable teaching resource as it identifies and explores, in a variety of ways, themes that are crucial to an understanding of British video art. The book aims to express the diversity of the nature of British 'video art' and of the critical writing about it. But the scope of the book is broader and far more ambitious, as it also attempts to theorize video art as a historical phenomenon (with the obvious difficulty of tracing the past of a practice and of a discursive category at a historical moment when its very definition has become problematic) as well as offer a history or histories of this phenomenon. Furthermore, as the editor indicates in her introduction, the collection also aims to 'provide a range of *frameworks* – historical, theoretical, critical and chronological – within which to begin to understand the diversity of video work that was produced in Britain under the banner of video art during the 1970s and 1980s' (p. 8), and to 'take a first step' towards providing examples of 'serious critical writing' about video art.

A recurring theme that runs through the book is the questioning of both the 'essence' of video and of the nature of the critical writing about it. In this respect, a number of essays raise interesting and important issues of a theoretical, critical and historical nature, such

as video's challenge to the institution of art, the nature of television and television spectatorship; the possibilities of a 'different' television, the tensions between the different institutional practices and traditions of art and television as they are expressed around video art; the politics of distribution and exhibition; the conflict between 'self expression' and the 'commercial media'.

One of the collection's most useful features is the Chronological Guide to British Video Art which covers key moments in the development of British video art and includes exhibitions and television programmes, as well as influential groups, organizations and publications. The Guide represents the third and final section of the book, following on from 'Histories' and 'Theories and Criticism'.

The separation of history from theory, however, is a major weakness of the collection. Although the historical section offers a comprehensive documentation of the activities of the 1970s and the 1980s (the former more so than the latter) it does so in a way that appears to be almost completely unaware of methodological complexities. As a result, some of the weaker articles seem to fall for various forms of technological determinism, or for the 'great men' approach to history. Characteristic of this kind of history is the following passage from Mick Hartney's essay 'InT/Ventions: some instances of confrontation with British broadcasting':

In early 1969 Hoppy was in Italy pondering his next move. Jim Haynes, who with Jack Henry Moore had started the Arts Lab in London's Drury Lane, enthused to him about this new thing called video. Hoppy flew back to London, walked into Sony's UK headquarters near Heathrow airport and walked out with a portapak and playback kit on extended loan. Shortly afterwards he was loaned additional equipment by John Lennon and used it in May to document the Camden Arts Festival . . . (p. 26)

Stuart Marshall's essay dating from 1985, 'Video: from art to independence – a short history of new technology', is one of the historical section's more theoretically sophisticated contributions, as it makes specific links between institutional practices, technological developments and cultural forms.

Also of particular value is Sean Cubitt's 'Populism and Difficulty. television and video art' which provides a clear demonstration of the impossibility of separating theory from history. Cubitt consistently resists the temptation to attribute an 'essence' to video, and instead traces the history of a tension that lies at the heart of British video art:

I want to argue that the form is torn between two conflicting and perhaps unreconcilable demands: the demand, inherent in its proximity to TV, that it be popular, most of all in the senses of deriving from people's lived experience and appealing to large

numbers of the population, and the demand that it maintain that difficulty which has become the defining characteristic of art in the modern world, the difficulty which marks art's lonely freedom from the constraints of church, state and economy' (p. 293)

Significantly, the essay also refuses to yield to nostalgic impulses and lamentations of missed opportunities and unfulfilled utopias and, unlike other essays in this collection, it offers a perspective, a link between the past, the present and the future of video. The conclusion of Cubitt's essay,

Britain is no longer a state of mind but a node in the complex journeyings of people, ideas and art, albeit a node with a bureaucracy. As the 1990s draw the second Christian millennium to a close, we can begin to look forward to a struggle which will transform the global, and in doing so redefine what we understand as local (p. 310)

brings to the foreground one of the shortcomings of *Diverse Practices*, namely the rigid adherence to the 'British' dimension of British video art which characterizes the majority of the essays. The decision not to provide an international context for British video art not only offers a limited, insular view of its history, but also appears to overlook the essentially inter-national character of video work.

The editorial introduction to the collection opens with the observation that video art has not been accepted as 'a valid art activity . . . by the art establishment in this country'. The editor then proceeds to define the main objective of the collection:

[video art's] 'exclusion' from the art establishment in Britain has been experienced primarily in three ways: at the levels of funding, exhibition and critical writing. Although most would concede that during the last decade or so things have improved somewhat in the first two areas, there has remained a stubborn dearth of critical writing. The project of this anthology – which brings together newly commissioned essays and a small number of previously published articles – is to take a first step towards filling that persistent gap. (p. 2)

The theoretical/critical section of the book therefore attempts to offer examples of critical writing deemed appropriate to 'video art'.

This project runs immediately into problems. The opening essay of the section (Philip Hayward's 'A fine mess: criticism and video culture in the 1980s and beyond'), for example, polemically rejects the usefulness and the necessity of any 'unified theory' or 'serious criticism' which addresses video art as 'a thing in itself'. Hayward explains that the failure of critical writing on video is firstly due to the nature of the object of criticism itself ('video' is an umbrella term which covers heterogeneous practices that in themselves lack

any purity as they persistently cross over boundaries), and secondly suggests that there is an inability to establish a coherent and convincing critical methodology. Hayward then proceeds to propose a model of critical discourse which theorizes video, or to use his own term 'advanced technology art', in the broader cultural context of new technologies. In this sense, Hayward's essay represents a triple rejection of the very project of the collection: 'video art' is not an appropriate object of study, the critical writing about it is a 'fine mess', and the only way to theorize video is by placing it within the discourse of a well-established academic discipline, namely Cultural Studies

The essay that follows (Julia Knight's 'In search of an identity distribution, exhibition and the process of British video art'), despite providing an intelligent and well-documented exposition of how distribution and exhibition have 'reshaped and redefined' the 'identity of British video art' is also unable to offer a methodological or theoretical paradigm. Indeed, once again, the discourse is marked by negativity. The identity of video art is seen as problematic for a variety of reasons: namely, video suffers from a superficial resemblance with other media which in turn are usually theorized in a mass communications context and not as art forms, video is not site specific, video is heterogeneous, and so on.

The usefulness of the term 'video art' is the topic of two more essays (John Wyver's 'The necessity of doing away with "video art"' and Michael O'Pray's 'The impossibility of doing away with video "art"'). While Wyver's thesis is a more simplistic and polemical version of Hayward's argument, whereby we can make sense of video only if we perceive it as yet another component in the broader culture of the 'moving image', O'Pray undertakes to defend 'video art' and to demonstrate the usefulness of the term. His argument is partly pragmatic/political and partly theoretical. 'Video art' as a discursive category has the crucial function, according to O'Pray, of legitimating 'video art' as a practice. This is necessary because 'video art' gives expression to 'concerns that cannot be addressed within [an] all encompassing moving image culture' (p. 325). In particular, O'Pray singles out representations of the 'self' and explorations of the body as of particular value, as he concludes:

the necessity of video art qua art on the contemporary scene flows precisely from its role as facilitator of the subjective, the 'self' or the personal. In other words, the site of the subject – as artist, subject(-matter) and spectator – cannot find its fullest articulation in the general culture of images espoused by Wyver. (p. 332)

This is perhaps an accurate description of a certain tendency evident in recent video works, but it is in no way a rigorous theoretical premiss on which to base either 'video art's' identity or 'serious critical writing about video art'. Indeed, in her essay 'The pursuit of

the personal in British video art', Catherine Elwes locates the preoccupation with the 'personal', 'diversity' and 'difference' that recent feminist video practices demonstrate within the wider context of the pursuit of self-expression in art in general.

Furthermore, what is rather disturbing is the particular way in which the desire to legitimate an artistic practice is connected with the need for a 'serious critical writing' about it. This project is paradoxical in a number of ways: firstly, because a number of the essays included in the collection achieve their 'critical seriousness' by borrowing the methodologies and theoretical perspectives of other critical traditions; secondly, the 'alternative' character of video is evoked in what is clearly an attempt to become assimilated by the 'arts establishment'; and finally, because this legitimating force seems to reside outside the artistic practice itself, within another discourse or within a different institution.

Diverse Practices succeeds in providing chronological and conceptual frameworks that give the reader some insight into the complex, contradictory and diverse phenomenon of British video art. It also contains some good examples of scholarly work on video, but most of the contributions suffer methodologically, and are obsessively preoccupied with the polemics of the 'sector', and in this sense they cannot be held as 'examples of serious critical writing', or as assisting video art to achieve 'legitimacy'.

review:

Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, 270 pp.

CATHERINE FOWLER

Speaking of the effect produced in her films by extended duration of static shots, Chantal Akerman has said, 'I want people to lose themselves in the frame, and at the same time to be truly, confronting the space'.¹ This statement is equally pertinent to Margulies's project in *Nothing Happens*, which is to stay longer and stare harder than previous critics at the work of Chantal Akerman. This book-length study is long overdue, since critical writing on Akerman's work has been composed almost entirely of fleeting glances. The body of writing on Akerman can largely be found in 1970s feminist film theory, with *Jeanne Dielman 23 quai du commerce 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) in particular becoming the practical illustration of concepts such as female authorship, a feminine aesthetic and a feminist film practice. However, the main fleeting glance extended in *Nothing Happens* belongs mainly to Peter Wollen when he observes in his 1981 article on 'the two avant gardes' that Akerman's cinema is exceptional in its combination of New York modernism and Parisian theory.²

The reference to Wollen signals the similarity of the two projects as well as locating Margulies's critical context: *Nothing Happens* takes its premiss not from feminist film theory but from Formalist debates. Wollen's article was a contribution to debates about the interrelations of various alternative cultural practices. Margulies intervenes in the more fundamental issues of realism and modernism and their crossing of national boundaries: Italian neo-realism,

1 Gary Indiana 'Getting ready for the golden eighties: a conversation with Chantal Akerman', *ArtForum*, Summer (1983), pp. 55–61

2 Peter Wollen, 'The avant-gardes Europe and America', *Framework* no. 14 (1981) p. 9

New York minimalism and pop art, the films of Warhol, Godard and Yvonne Rainer are all referenced. Through this intervention she succeeds in making connections which revise previously held assumptions about the boundaries between theory and practice. In its perhaps unfashionable commitment to a revision of modernism, *Nothing Happens* sits alongside such recent work as John Orr's *Cinema and Modernity*.³ However, Margulies's focus on the work of a woman director shifts the burden and suggests comparisons also with feminist writings such as *Points of Resistance* or *To Desire Differently*.⁴

Margulies's prime object of study is 'the quotidian' and the various ways in which this space is figured in the work of theorists from Bazin through Barthes to the Annales school, Deleuze, Guattari and Godard. In her early discussions of the work of Bazin and of neorealism, she introduces a series of 'hinges' via which she will construct the convergence of realism and modernism. These hinges originate in the language of neorealism: extended duration, static tableau framing and the representation of the general, typical or clichéd.

Both extended duration and a static tableau framing are discussed through the work of the neorealists and of Andy Warhol. Margulies charts the ways in which a technique presumed at first to offer an experience closer to our perception of reality came to be used to foreground the materiality of cinema and to increase our awareness of representation. However, while Warhol's intention is anti-illusionist, Akerman, suggests Margulies, aims to hover between reality and representation, rejecting anti-illusionism in favour of a combination of 'illusion' and 'fact', demanding that the spectator both lose and confront space. What is also suggested here is an impulse similar to that explored in Tom Gunning's writings on the 'cinema of attractions'⁵ – a fascination with the possibilities the camera holds for framing space and focusing the gaze. However, Margulies does not acknowledge this connection, preferring instead to attribute Akerman's formal tendencies to a structuralist impulse.

The representation of the general, typical and clichéd is pursued by Margulies through comparing Yvonne Rainer's *Film About a Woman Who* . . . (1974) and Godard's *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle/Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966) with Akerman's *Je tu il elle* and *Jeanne Dielman* respectively. While this comparison takes its cue from the realist debate, it is also inflected by film feminism. Like Wollen, Margulies wishes to chart the exceptional. The problematic quality of Akerman's work here, though, is how to represent the general, typical and clichéd without resorting to essentialism. Margulies's argument is that in their representations of the individual Rainer's films drain the personal of idiosyncrasies while Akerman's uphold the particular through her assertion of description. The conclusion is much the same. Margulies looks at how *Deux ou trois choses* and *Jeanne Dielman* both use the

3 John Orr, *Cinema and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993)

4 Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power and Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943–71* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990)

5 Tom Gunning, 'Cinema of attractions', *Wide Angle* vol 8 nos 3/4 (1986) pp 63–77

'mytheme of housewife/prostitute' (p. 128), arguing that whilst Godard's Juliette becomes a convenient collective paradigm, Akerman's Jeanne does not simply stand in as a Barthesian sign but instead, through her obsessive behaviour, exudes an 'exceptional typicality'. However, while opening this section through the frame of film feminism, Margulies seems reluctant to return to it in her conclusion. Having shown that Akerman's formal choices dictate her treatment of these areas she offers no further explanation of why Akerman might have made these choices.

Despite the reluctance to make connections between Akerman and critical fields besides Formalism, the first four chapters of *Nothing Happens* are convincingly argued, with connections across different contexts producing a compelling study of the crossing of boundaries. In her final two chapters, Margulies moves on to Akerman's 1980s and 1990s work; here, however, there is a disappointing lack of context, both critical and historical. Equally, although Akerman has made nine feature films over the past twenty years, the focus of this book remains with *Jeanne Dielman* and *Je tu il elle*, thus perpetuating the tunnel vision which has characterised critical work on Akerman.

The lack of critical context contributes to the partiality of these last chapters and leaves unanswered many questions about how the ideals of realism and modernism might figure in postmodern systems of thought. Equally absent is any sense of how Akerman's cinema has changed and developed, so that films such as *Nuit et jour* and *Golden Eighties* are measured against the same model of hyperrealism as that used for Akerman's 1970s work. What is lost in consequence is any consideration of the 'the pleasures' Akerman's cinema might offer. Margulies's basically 1970s critical model casts Akerman's cinema in the mould of a 'dry and moving intensity'; a characterisation which does not apply to the filmmaker's subsequent work.

It is here that Margulies's Formalist project is revealed, and distinguishes itself from works such as *Points of Resistance* or *To Desire Differently*. The consequent lack of attention to Akerman's later (and latest) work is that *Nothing Happens* could easily have been written in Wollen's era: the book sits uneasily within a 1990s context of film theory inflected by cultural and identity politics. What is lost is any sense of continuity and change, or of a developing practice. Akerman's work is used to shift theoretical paradigms, and yet ironically the 'Akerman-paradigm' which has tied the filmmaker to the 1970s period of practice and hung *Jeanne Dielman* like an albatross around her neck is retained by Margulies. In reopening critical debate around Akerman's work, *Nothing Happens* suggests that many fleeting glances need to be pursued. What it leaves unexplored, though, is how this pursuit might succeed in a contemporary context.